

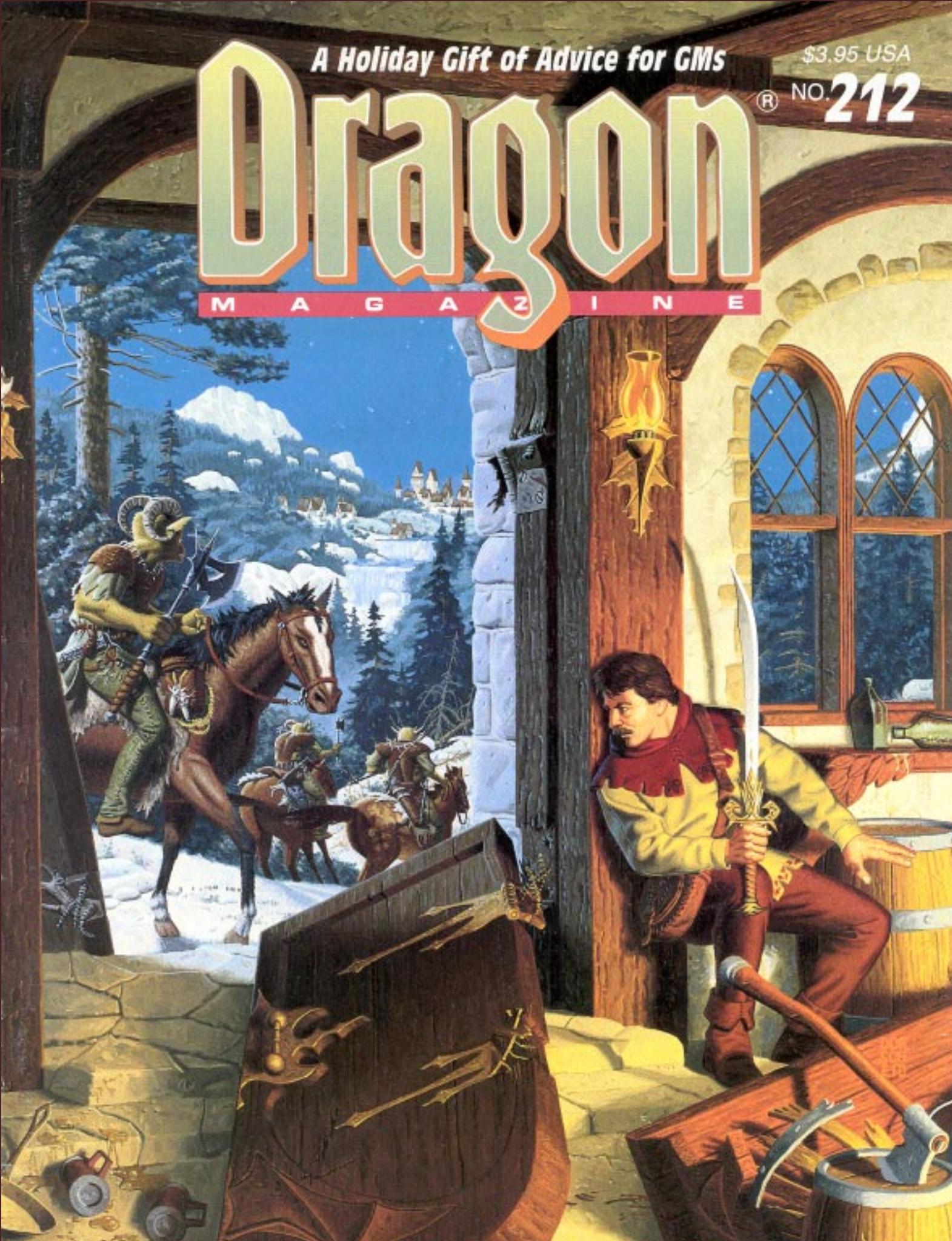
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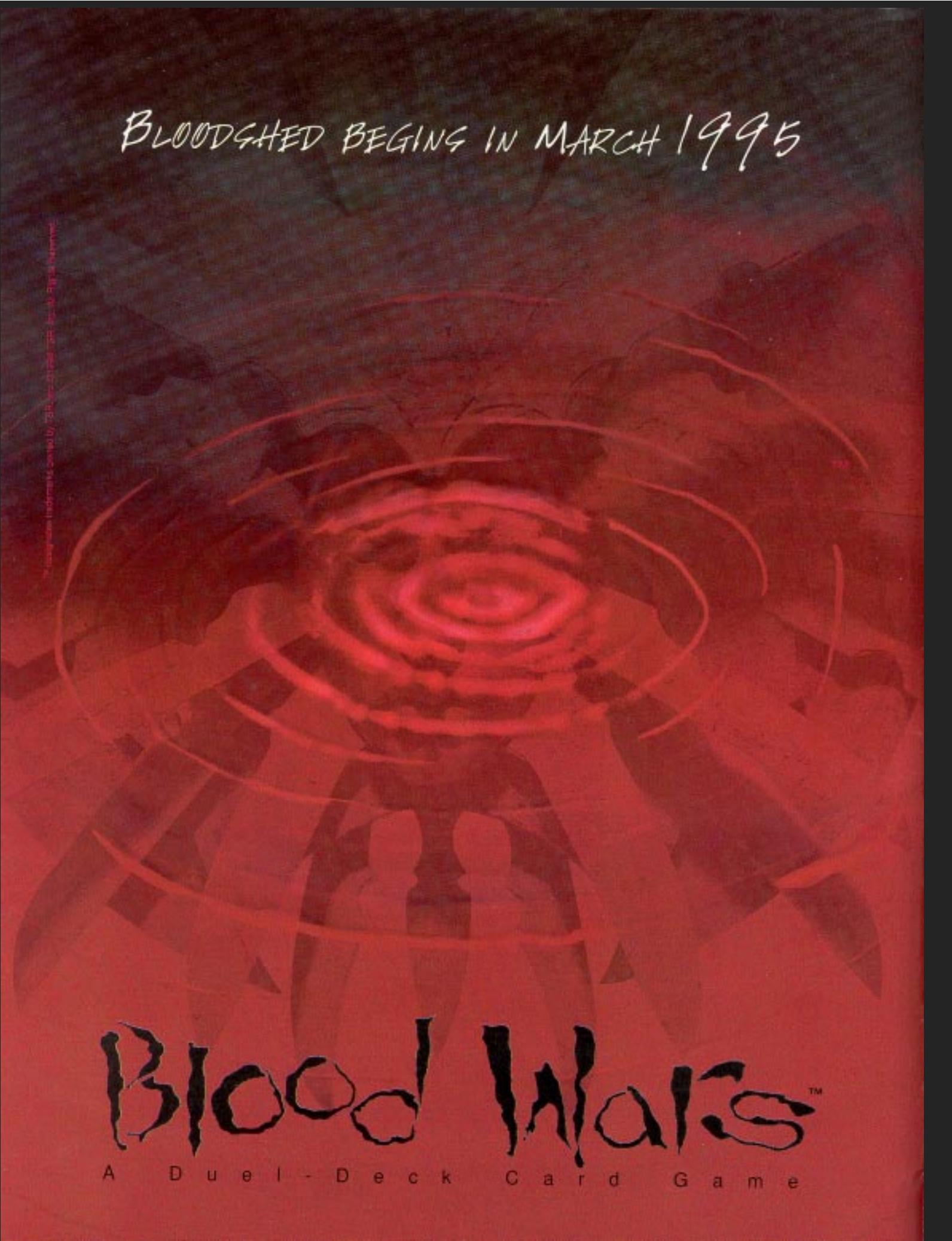
NO. 212

MAGAZINE



BLOODY BEGINS IN MARCH 1995

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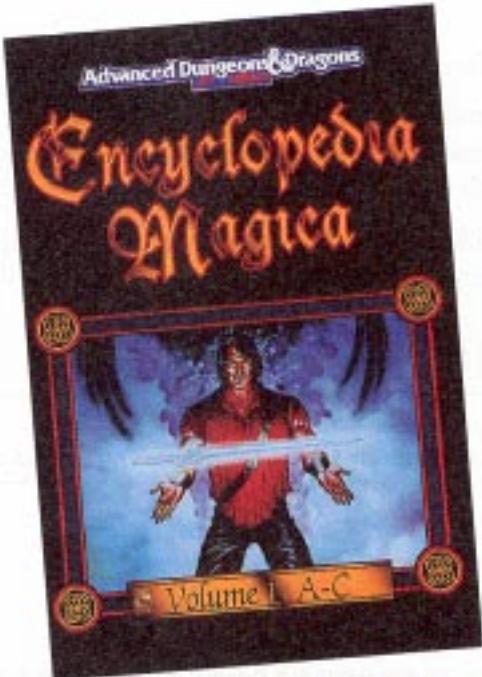
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Issue #212  
Vol. XIX, No. 7  
December 1994

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DRAGON® Magazine (ISSN 0279-6848) is published monthly by TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756 (201 Sheridan Springs Road), Lake Geneva WI 53147, United States of America. The postal address for all materials from the United States of America and Canada except subscription orders is: DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, (201 Sheridan Springs Road), Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.; telephone (414) 248-3625; fax (414) 248-0389. The postal address for all materials from Europe is: DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom; telephone: (0223) 212517 (U.K.), 44-223-212517 (international); telex: 818761; fax (0223) 248066 (U.K.), 44-223-248066 (international).

**Distribution:** DRAGON Magazine is available from game and hobby shops throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and through a limited number of other overseas outlets. Distribution to the book trade in the United States is by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Ltd. Distribution to the book trade in the United Kingdom is by TSR Ltd. Send orders to: Random House, Inc., Order Entry Department, Westminster MD 21157, U.S.A.; telephone: (800) 733-3000. Newsstand distribu-

tion throughout the United Kingdom is by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE, United Kingdom; telephone: 0895-444055.

**Subscriptions:** Subscription rates via second-class mail are as follows: \$30 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent to an address in the U.S.; \$36 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent to an address in Canada; £21 for 12 issues sent to an address within the United Kingdom; £30 for 12 issues sent to an address in Europe; \$50 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent by surface mail to any other address, or \$90 in U.S. funds for 12 issues sent air mail to any other address. Payment in full must accompany all subscription orders. Methods of payment include checks or money orders made payable to TSR, Inc., or charges to valid MasterCard or VISA credit cards; send subscription orders with payments to: TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 5695, Boston MA 02206, U.S.A. In the United Kingdom, methods of payment include cheques or money orders made payable to TSR Ltd., or charges to a valid ACCESS or VISA credit card; send subscription orders with payments to TSR Ltd., as per that address above. Prices are subject to change without prior notice. The issue of expiration of



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each subscription is printed on the mailing label of each subscriber's copy of the magazine. Changes of address for the delivery of subscription copies must be received at least six weeks prior to the effective date of the change in order to assure uninterrupted delivery.

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## COVER

"The Better Part of Valor", this month's cover painting by Les Dorscheid, displays an uncommon occurrence in many game scenarios—a character exercising the valuable commodity known as discretion.

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Second-class postage paid at Lake Geneva, Wis., U.S.A., and additional mailing offices Postmaster: Send address changes to DRAGON Magazine, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. USPS 318-790, ISSN 1062-2101.

# Letters

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. If you wish your letter to be published, you must sign it. We will not publish anonymous letters. We will withhold your name if you request it.

## Game Fair deadline changes

Dear Readers,

If you want to run an event at the 1995 GEN CON® Game Fair, the convention staff needs to hear from you by February 21, 1995. This date is the deadline for judges to get the convention staff their plans for single game sessions, tournaments, seminars, or any sort of event to be listed in the master schedule for the convention.

In past years, there were two deadlines: one for the Pre-Reg book, and one for the On-Site book. For the 1995 Game Fair, the Pre-Reg book will be the first and last word on scheduled events—the On-Site book will not contain any new events but will identify events that have been cancelled or filled since the Pre-Reg book was printed.

The 1995 Game Fair will be held on August 10-13 at the MECCA Convention Center in Milwaukee. To receive a judge or event form, or any other information concerning the Game Fair, write to the GEN CON Game Fair office at: P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147. Thanks for your attention.

The GEN CON Game Fair staff

## Finder of lost assassins

Dear Dragon,

I'm trying to track down the issue of DRAGON Magazine that contained an article detailing three new kits for the fighter class. I specifically remember that one of the kits was an "assassin" kit for warriors.

Also, does TSR, Inc., have a catalog that contains all the products the company carries?

Lt. Brian K. Flood  
Leesville LA

The article, "Completing the Complete Fight. er" by David Howery, appeared in DRAGON issue #172. Besides the assassin kit Brian mentioned, the author also detailed nomad and northman kits for fighter characters (inspired by the Mongols and the Vikings, respectively).

TSR does indeed have a catalog containing all the products TSR currently has in stock. (The catalog also lists numerous products from many other companies.) You can obtain a copy of the most recent catalog by requesting one at the following address: Mail Order Hobby Shop, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

—Dale

## "What are my chances?"

Dear Dragon,

In the "Letters" columns in DRAGON issues #208 and #209, you answered letters asking how readers can go about submitting their work to be published in your magazines. I won't ask you to go over it all again.

What I do want to ask is this: What kind of chance do I have of being published? Do you, like a lot of other publications, only consider pieces from established writers? Since I'm not a "name" in the fantasy industry, should I bother taking the time and effort to put together a well-written finished product? How many submissions do you receive?

It would be great to be published in DRAGON Magazine, but do I stand a chance?

Sean Griffith  
Omaha NE

*This is one of the most common questions the Periodicals staff gets, but the answer isn't as simple as the question would make it seem.*

*Many people who ask us this question assume that the article-selection process is like a lottery, where we, the editors, reach down into the slush pile (the accumulated, unread manuscripts) and randomly pull out a fistful of articles that we then accept and publish. It doesn't work that way.*

*Regardless of whether we receive 10 manuscripts or 100 or 1,000, if only three of those articles, modules, or short stories are of publishable quality, only those three are going to be accepted and published. Put another way, the number of submissions we accept is not determined by the number of manuscripts we receive. It is determined, however, by how many good submissions we receive. We reject submissions that are not of suitable quality to be published in the magazines, and accept those that are of such quality.*

*The editors of TSR's magazines do not care if the author of a piece is a "name" in the gaming industry.*

*try any more than we care about the authors age, sex, religion, or ethnic background. We care about publishing only the best submissions we can. Besides, every "name" in this industry (and every industry for that matter) was an unknown at some point. If you can put together a well-written and exciting submission, we'll be more than happy to accept and publish it. Hey, that's my favorite part of this job!*

—Dale

## Books to games

Dear Dragon,

I've been role-playing for four years. I was introduced to the AD&D® game through the FORGOTTEN REALMS® novels, and most of my inspiration comes from that source of ideas. I've tried several times to convert my favorite stories into game adventures, but it is more difficult than it seems (especially creating sub-plots to help get the PCs back on track after they wander off on some tangent). This is a plea for help to experienced DMs who have succeeded where I have failed.

Stephen A. Jessup  
Emsworth, England

*"Hitting the Books" by Eric R. Noah, in this very issue of the magazine, deals extensively with the problems of converting fantasy literature into fantasy game adventures. Beyond the terrific advice Eric gives, DMs everywhere are encouraged to write with their own hints and tips to help solve Stephen's problem.*

—Dale



### Hunting for your next game convention?

If you're looking for a good time gaming, turn to this issue's "Convention Calendar" for current information on where the fun is.

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## Give the gift of gaming

This time of year is the traditional gift-giving season for most of us, and I have been wracking my brain trying to come up with an appropriate topic for this editorial. I considered listing some of my favorite TSR products that came out in the past 12 months—a sort of gift-buying guide, if you will—with the purpose of exposing you to some great stuff that you may have missed in the course of 1994. (Heck, even those of us who work here have a hard time keeping up with *everything* that TSR, Inc., produces in a year.) But I thought that an editorial about TSR products in a TSR magazine would come across as transparent, crass commercialism. (Even though I'm delighted to see some of the different directions TSR is taking with products such as the COUNCIL OF WYRM™ set, the *Masque of the Red Death* variant campaign, and the PLANESCAPE™ setting. Oops, there I go...)

Instead, I decided to talk about another variety of gift, the kind most folks don't think about giving because this sort of thing isn't what comes to mind when one hears the word "gift." (Besides, most of these gifts won't cost you any cash.) I'm talking about activities that can improve our enjoyment of the games we play and that can promote gaming itself. Let's start with some simple "gifts" you can give to the members of your own gaming group.

**Offer to drive others to the game.** Not everyone always has access to a vehicle to get to the game. I didn't own a car until after I was in college, so my high-school gaming buddies always had to drive over and pick me up before the game and drive me home afterward. They never complained, but it must have been annoying. Many younger gamers and couples who share one vehicle can't just hop in the car and drive to a game on a moment's notice. Try to plan games ahead of time, so no one gets stranded without a ride or has to bow out of a game night because she has no way to get there. Take turns driving to the game site. Carpool—it's good for the environment (plus you can drive in the carpool lane).

**Offer to host the game.** It gets to be a real drag if one person always has to host the game session. He has to clean the place up before (and sometimes after) the game. There may be good reasons to gather and play there (open spaces, big tables, central location, and so on), but every host will appreciate a week or two off every once in a while. Similarly, the host of the game often provides all the refreshments for the

players during a game. Bring your own goodies to the game, or ask the host if you can stop on your way to the game and pick up some soda, snacks, or whatever your gaming group munches on while playing.

**Offer to be the DM.** In most game campaigns, one person handles the task of being the DM. Over the course of a few months—even if she loves being a game master—every DM likes a chance to kick back and just be a player now and then. She won't have to sweat out creating another adventure, drawing the maps, or detailing the treasures and traps. The substitute DM can run the same game (or even the same campaign if it's okay with everyone involved), the group can take these opportunities to experiment with other role-playing games, or you could devote an evening to playing board games or watching cheesy movies. ("Bad movie nights" are a TSR tradition.)

**Teach someone how to play.** You know that coworker, roommate, buddy, or spouse who always wants to hear your latest game story, or who asks you to explain just what "that game" is all about? Well, invite him to sit in on a game session, or better yet, have him come over and just try a little role-playing, never mind the rule books and all that. On an individual level, this is the most important gift you can give. Not only will you introduce a potential player or DM to your gaming circle, but you'll also be doing gaming a favor by passing the torch that was passed to you at some point in the past. Some of us came across gaming in a magazine article or other source, but most gamers were introduced to our fantastic hobby by other gamers. Imagine all the fun you could've missed out on if the person (or persons) who got you started in gaming hadn't taken the time to get you rolling.

For the truly ambitious, there are a couple of more time-intensive gaming gifts that you, or your entire gaming group, can give.

**Form a game club.** If you're lucky enough to have a steady, devoted group of gamers in your area, get them together and form a game club. (The RPGA® Network has details on forming an RPGA club. Write to: RPGA Network, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.) Formal organizations such as clubs often have easier access to resources such as facilities on school campuses, discounts on gaming purchases and convention entry fees, and so forth. An established club in your com-

munity also shows that gamers are mature, responsible people. Plus, the existence of a club gives interested novices or newcomers to your area a place to turn for gaming and friendship.

### Organize a game convention.

DRAGON® issue #159 had an article, "Pulling a Con Job" by Thomas M. Kane, that gave much useful advice on organizing, running, and troubleshooting a small game convention. You needn't aim for the status (or attendance) of a GEN CON® Game Fair or a DragonCon. A 50- or 100-person con can help promote gaming in your area, and might even make your game club a little money. Many game shops and companies can help promote cons, too. (Don't forget to send a listing to DRAGON Magazine's own "Convention Calendar."

I want to mention one final gift you can give, even though it's not directly related to games or gaming. Like many gamers, I read a lot. In fact, I buy far more books than I'm ever likely to read. Every once in a while (i.e., when my book shelves start to overflow), I do my best to adopt a dispassionate attitude and go through my collection asking myself, "Am I honestly ever going to read this?" If the answer's no, it gets tossed into a box. When I'm done, I cart the box down to the local library and donate the books. That way, others will have the opportunity to read and enjoy them. You can do the same. You also can donate used games to your game club, or take them to a local con and sell them in the auction or flea market. This allows others to play the games, plus you'll probably make a few bucks. You might even make enough to go out and buy yourself that new boxed set or module—as a gift to yourself!

Dale A.  
Donovan

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# First Quest™

FIRST QUEST is the title of TSR, Inc.'s Audio CD Introduction to Role-playing Game. This series is a feature where veterans of role-playing describe their first experiences in the hobby.

## One dead skeleton. The rest is history.

by Timothy Brown

"Cool."

Or something like that.

Anyway, that was my initial reaction when a friend described the concept of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game to me. I was only 12 or so at the time, but I was already an avid war gamer; no board game too complex, no number of miniatures-in-need-of-painting too many. Case-point rules and volumes of army lists didn't scare me. On the contrary, how could a game that was essentially played out in your imagination be any good?

"How do you play?" I asked.

"It's kind of hard to explain," my friend replied.

"Give it a try."

"Well, it's all swords and sorcery."

"Like Tolkien?" I'd probably read the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy four times by then.

"Yeah. Only you make up the story as you go along."

"Like what kind of story?"

"Okay. Say you're a warrior, and you venture into a dragon's lair and slay it. Then on the way out half the treasure magically turns into some other monster and you have to slay that too."

"Is there a board?" Games had boards. It was a rule.

"No, but I've seen guys use miniatures to represent their characters and the monsters."

"Miniatures?" Something I could relate to. I remembered shoving fantasy miniatures out of the way to get to the Napoleons before.

"Yeah, they move them around on mats with square grids with dungeons drawn on them. Do you want to play?"

"What do I have to do?"

"Nothing. I've got the rule books. I'll make up a dungeon and we'll play."

Lots of rules. Something else I could relate to.

"Cool." Like I said, cool.

It bears mentioning that our gaming group at the time was essentially me, my brother, and some of his friends. They were geeks but I was pretty sure I wasn't. My brother wasn't so bad, either. (He's liable to read this so I thought I'd throw that in. In my own defense, I went on into

rock & roll, thus disproving the geek hypothesis. For the record.) It was one of these guys who had discovered the D&D® game, bought the original three-book set, and got us all to play.

As advertised, he came prepared with the rules, the funny dice, graph paper, and a handful of monster and adventurer miniatures. I grabbed the miniatures right off. He essentially held our hands and had us roll up characters. So far it didn't suck.

Then we started playing.

To make a long story short, he had us blunder into a dungeon and in no time we had been squashed by great big monsters like baby dragons and vampires and such. (He wasn't a very good DM yet.) I was the only one left, fleeing back the way we had come in with barely a hit point to my name when I came upon a skeleton. I rolled. I killed it.

Now remember, I was a hardened war gamer who had campaigned all over this planet. I'd wiped out Panzer divisions and not felt so good. I'd conquered the whole friggin' world before and not felt such a sense of accomplishment. One skeleton in pieces on the ground in front of my character. I was hooked.

We all were. We pretty much abandoned traditional war games for more than a year, instead playing the D&D® game every time we got together. I drew out miles and miles of dungeons. ("Wilderness adventures? Sure, I guess they're possible.") I craved graph paper.

I went to the hobby shop to buy the rules. They didn't have them, but they did have DRAGON® Magazine #3 for sale. I bought it. It had *Fineous Fingers* and the Dexterity table and the birth tables. I wrote to TSR and sent money for the rules and inquired about DRAGON issues #1 and #2. They sent the rules and both magazines, though I'd only sent money for the rules. Wow, those guys at TSR were nice.

We played mindless dungeon slaughter games and loved it. We misinterpreted the rules as we saw fit and loved it (we made up spell-point rules, we gave fighters one swing per round per level). Ah, those were the days.

There were three phases of gaming that came upon me in rapid succession:

The Judges' Guild phase: I saw ads for

the now-defunct Judges' Guild in DRAGON issues and noticed they were located in a town less than an hour's drive from where I lived. What luck! I got my parents to drive me down there and blew a fortune (for the time, that is) on stuff, including *Tegel Manor* and *City State of the Invincible Overlord*. They were great! We played in the City State for months.

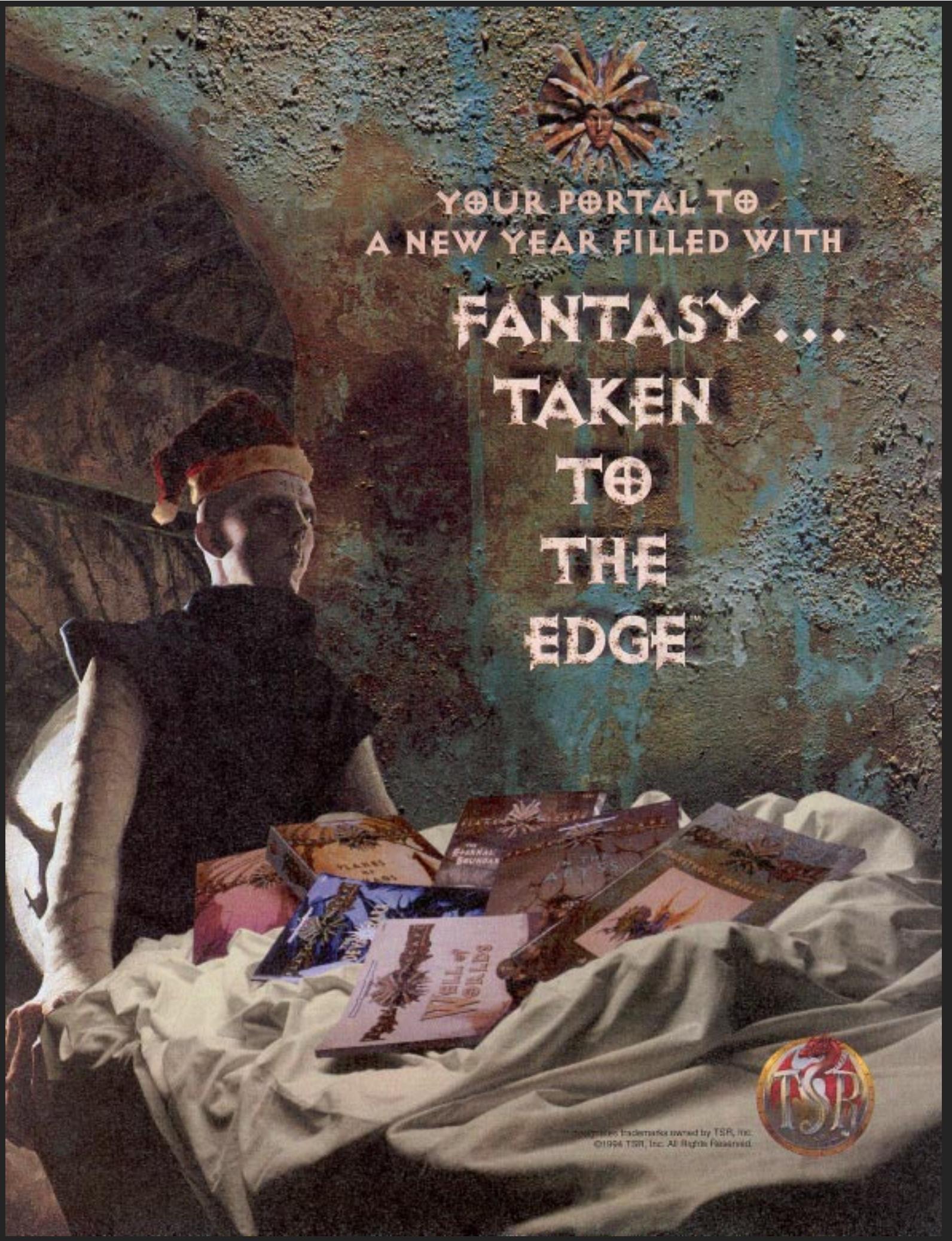
The D&D game-by-mail phase: Every group of gamers parts, especially when some members discover girls, jobs, and cars. Ours split up but I still liked playing games. I was involved in a PBM game called STARWEB\* from Flying Buffalo (game #16 for those of you who remember back that far) and suggested to some of the other players that we play the D&D game by mail. The response was overwhelming; they all wanted to do it, running their own games and playing in mine. We wrote back and forth fairly regularly for a few years before it all wound down. I wish I still had some of those letters; they were good fun. (The geek thing was starting to bother me during this phase.)

The pass-the-notes-during-class phase: Trigonometry and Pre-Calculus just didn't hold my attention too well, so I started a D&D game in the middle of class. My buddies and I passed notes back and forth without shame; the teacher never caught on. I infected a whole bunch of fellow students that way—normal kids, I mean, I started feeling better about the geek thing.

From then to now is kind of a blur.

Anyway, now I'm the boss of lots of very creative people who make wonderful AD&D® game worlds and adventures. I get to pass judgment on upcoming releases, and I think back to my early days of playing the D&D game. Would this product have been fun for me then, I ponder. Is it as cool as *City State of the Invincible Overlord* was to me then? Those days and the feelings I had guide my thinking still. It all comes down to that day when just one skeleton stood between me and what would have probably been a much more normal life.

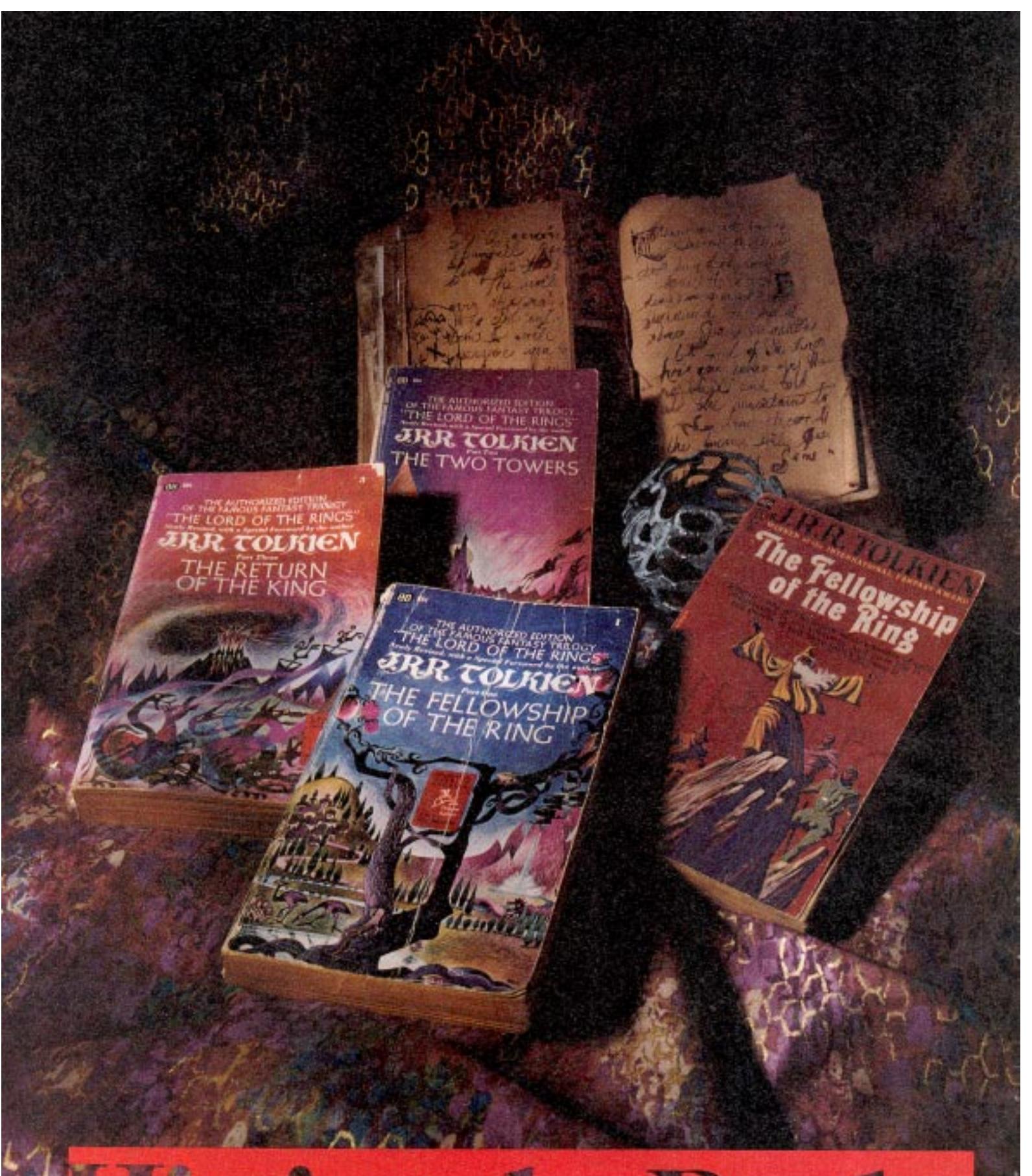
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# Hitting the Books

by Eric R. Noah

Photography by Charles Kohl

## Make your games more like fantasy literature

If you are like many people who enjoy fantasy role-playing games, at some point you finished reading a classic of fantasy literature and came away with a sense of wonder, a feeling that you had been given a rare privilege.

With a classic such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, you definitely can sense a link between the literature and the games. It was no wonder that someone invented a game that allowed average, ordinary people to play the parts of heroes in adventure after adventure set in realms of magic and wonder. It turned out that you were not alone in wanting to act out a tale of fantasy, and with the advent of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game (and later, its descendants) this desire could become—almost—a reality.

If you are a Dungeon Master who is new to the hobby, you may be wondering how your homemade fantasy adventures could be mere pale imitations of the fantasy literature you've read. If you are an experienced DM, you may be feeling that your creations, no matter how clever or unique, somehow lack the depth of fantasy stories.

There's a reason for this: the best fantasy literature is literature first, and fantasy second. No fantasy story could be read with satisfaction if it went like many game adventures: a bunch of characters who don't know each other get hired by someone they don't know to find something valuable in a nearby dungeon, which is guarded by a bunch of monsters who don't know each other or why they stay there. The characters fall in some pits, kill monsters and take their valuables, and eventually stumble upon the thing they were hired to find. They leave the dungeon, go back to the person who hired them, collect their pay and upgrade their equipment. The characters didn't learn anything about themselves, each other, or the world around them. There was no attempt to build tension, no satisfying climax, no wrap-up to allow reflection. This was no story. It was, at best, a strategy exercise.

Perhaps that example sounds extreme and perhaps your own adventures are much better than that. No matter how much work goes into it though, even the best game adventure often doesn't stack up to even an average fantasy story. This is because the elements that make literature so rich and rewarding are glossed over by many gamers when they create adventures. If you want your fantasy game to satisfy you the way fantasy literature does, you will need more than magical swords and talking dragons. You need to deal with setting, character, conflict, theme, and plot elements, including exposition, climax, and resolution. No complete story can exist without each of these characteristics being included in some way.

Following is a discussion of each of these elements: what they are, what they do for a story, and how to apply this information to your gaming experience. My advice is to plan on doing only a little of this "story building" at a time. The art of creating fully satisfying adventures does not come all at once; it is developed throughout years of interest in the hobby. I also suggest that you share this information with your players and other DMs—you'll be surprised at the help they can give you. Finally, while I make reference to the AD&D® game and specific works of literature, these principles can be applied to any fantasy role-playing game and most role-playing games of other genres as well—and certainly many other works of literature could be mentioned in place of the examples used here.

### Setting

This is a pretty simple concept to understand: it is the place and time in which a story's events occur. It includes things such as terrain, weather, society, era, season, and can include a tone or mood that the author is trying to create and sustain. Setting is critical to fantasy literature (and therefore, to fantasy gaming) because it is more than a backdrop for character actions. It is an environment with which the characters interact. A

DRAGON S. W. D.

particular setting can be a friend or a foe to characters, but it should never just be. It should have a life of its own, with unique features that generate theme, conflict, and plot.

Let's take a look at the setting from *Lord of the Rings*. Middle Earth is an environment dominated by terrain, societies, and tone. Tolkien takes great care to describe the simplicity of life in the Shire because he wants the reader to compare it with the increasingly more complex human societies such as Rohan and Gondor. By drawing this comparison, he attempts to make a statement about human nature. (This kind of statement is called a theme; more on that later.) Tolkien also vividly describes the vast lush areas of nature as the Fellowship of the Ring travels across Middle Earth, only to present us with the dry, cracked, dark land of Mordor. By showing us that the natural world is in danger of corruption by the forces of evil, he also suggests that its inhabitants face the same danger on a spiritual or moral level. In no case is the setting described merely so that the characters have a place to stand. The setting itself is vital to the story.

The good news is that the AD&D game has a wide variety of vivid settings, including the FORGOTTEN REALMS®, DARK SUN®, and AL-QADIM® worlds, the dark domains of a RAVENLOFT® campaign, and the MYSTARA™ and PLANESCAPE™ campaigns. All of TSR's game worlds, old and new, provide solid settings that seem to generate stories on their own. For instance, take Athas, the world of the DARK SUN environment. This is a place where power (in the form of magic) is clearly capable of the destruction of the natural world if it is used improperly. That's a theme that can be incorporated into many adventures set in this place. The gods have abandoned Athas, but do the inhabitants give up? No. Instead they find ways to draw strength from the elements or from their own minds. The clear lesson here on human nature is that humans are adaptable and will survive no matter what. The lands of the DARK SUN setting come equipped with theme and conflict built right in. So do the other published TSR game settings, to varying degrees.

Here's the bad news, though: You can have all the good setting material you could imagine and still not use it to its full advantage. You can avoid this by making sure you clearly understand and use the features of a given setting that make it unique. After all, why would something be different if it weren't important? Ignore the defilers of Athas, the Cataclysm of Krynn, or the Dark Powers of the RAVENLOFT setting, and you're ignoring tools that can make your adventures rich and meaningful.

## Character

This is another easily grasped aspect: Characters are the people and other be-

ings that inhabit the setting of a story. Generally, there are two kinds of characters: static characters, who don't change or grow in any essential way, and dynamic ones, who do change, grow, or learn from the experiences they have in the story. In fantasy games, the characters run by the players are the dynamic characters, and those run by the game master are the static characters.

The AD&D game is almost totally focused on the generation and development of character abilities: what powers and restrictions the character has at any given time. It also does a pretty good job of explaining how PCs (through their players) interact with other PCs and with NPCs. This is accomplished in part by the concept of character alignment, which helps the DM decide how NPCs will react to any given situation, and aids the players in running their characters with consistency. But where fantasy game characters leave off, fantasy literature characters begin. Following are some notes about player characters and non-player characters, and how they can be run more like characters in a story:

*1. Always know what is motivating a character.* For the DM, this means developing at least a brief statement of purpose for each significant NPC created. For players, this means detailing a PCs likes and dislikes, goals, hopes and dreams, and then making sure the DM knows about them.

*2. NPCs should never be throwaway characters.* Just because they are static doesn't mean they're not important. Actually, the very fact that they generally don't change makes them extremely valuable as a measure of PC growth. When characters come back to their favorite tavern after a daring quest, they should be able to see how far they've come by sizing up the reactions of the bartender, who's the same as she's always been. Think of the end of the Ring trilogy: Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin return to the Shire decked out in foreign armor, some taller and stronger, some wounded, all changed. No one reacts to them as if they were the same old hobbits they were when they left for Mount Doom. And that's the way it should be.

*3. Although NPCs are generally static characters, not all of them should be.* Major foes and allies (especially NPC henchmen) should have opportunities to learn from their own experiences. How would PCs react if an NPC villain suddenly had a change of heart? What if a trusted ally turned against the PCs? You can bet they'd be surprised! Recall how Gandalf the Gray, a character seemingly incapable of further growth, became Gandalf the White after his near-death experience. What a breath of fresh air that was to the story!

*4. When the players initially generate their characters, survey them to see what they've decided their characters are interested in.* Are they fascinated by relics of

the ancients? Do they like social or political intrigue? Do they want chances to meet the legendary NPCs of the area? Take the suggestions and run with them.

## Conflict

This element is a basic part of any story. Without conflict, there would be no story to tell. The three little pigs would have just stayed in their straw house. Little Red Riding Hood would have simply delivered Grandma's food. Conflict is the opposition of forces—but note that this opposition needn't be a violent one. In a world where more than one person exists, conflict is all around us.

Every conflict, whether it is a young girl breaking her first horse or a sergeant trying to gain his squad's respect, a man climbing a mountain or a child deciding if stealing is wrong, can be placed into one of four basic categories: person vs. person, person vs. environment, person vs. group, and person vs. self. Fantasy literature provides countless examples of each kind of conflict:

*Person vs. Person:* One of the purest examples imaginable is that of Bilbo Baggins engaged in a riddle contest with Gollum in *The Hobbit*. This kind of conflict is as important to character development as it is to the plot.

*Person vs. Environment (or Nature):* Frodo and Sam's struggle against the harsh landscape of Mordor is a vivid example of this conflict, which is necessary to establishing the tone and character development in their story.

*Person vs. Group (or Society):* There are many examples of this kind of conflict in fantasy literature, since fantasy heroes often tend to be loners, but a clear one is Drizzt Do'Urdon's conflict with his drow kin in *The Dark Elf* trilogy. The person-vs.-society conflict usually exists to support a theme concerning individual freedom or worth because the individual is almost always the one doing the right thing by being true to himself.

*Person vs. Self (the Moral Conflict):* This conflict is key to every single work of fantasy literature that I can think of. The hero starts out a little muddled about right and wrong, and through his adventures discovers his own values. One clear example is Frodo's struggle with his desire to simply kill Gollum. With a little advice from Gandalf, he decides to act with mercy and let Gollum live. When Frodo's will fails against the dominating power of the One Ring and he "decides" not to destroy it after all, it is only the fact that he acted with mercy that allows the quest to succeed: Because Gollum is alive, he is there to bite off Frodo's ring finger and fall, with the Ring, into the Crack of Doom. Tolkien's lesson is that we do not have to go against our own morality to destroy evil. Fighting evil is fine as long as we do not become evil while we're about it. Evil will destroy itself, if given a chance. Frodo's success in his moral conflict is living proof of

Relationship	Conflict
Relationship	
Siblings	
Cousins/other	
Distant relations	
Childhood friends	
From same region	
Served time together	
Educated together	
Worked together	
Worshiped together	
Secret relationship	

Tolkien's theme.

Consider the One Ring itself. Although its primary power at first seems to be its ability to grant invisibility to its user, the reader is made aware of its true purpose: to first inhibit and eventually destroy the user's ability to make moral choices. With a user such as Frodo, whose will and natural bent toward good are strong, the Ring is capable only of causing minor changes in personality. With a user such as Gollum, however, who was already treading the path of selfishness, the Ring completely subverts the mentality of its "owner," replacing free will with moral slavery. What clearer symbol could Tolkien possibly use to explore the issue of moral choice in his story?

Most fantasy role-playing games and their players cover the person-vs.-person conflict pretty thoroughly, usually in the form of "person vs. monster" or "person vs. enemy NPC." There are enough kinds of skills delineated in the rules to cover all kinds of personal confrontations, from combat to spell-casting to nonweapon skills to class-based or race-based abilities. The person-vs.-environment conflict also is considered fairly consistently by most games. Setting has been covered elsewhere in this article, but it cannot be overstressed that setting should interact with player characters as much as other personalities interact with them.

The struggle between individuals and society, on the other hand, is one that is often given short shrift in game adventures. Perhaps this is because the universally accepted solution to this conflict—"be yourself"—seems too obvious to most DMs and players for them to even consider. It also may be because, in fantasy games, the PCs can afford to "be themselves" in a conflict with society, and they will perse-

vere no matter what, because they are the movers and shakers of the world, the ones with power. Being unique and standing out in a crowd doesn't present any difficulties for you in a society when what makes you different is your ability to call flaming death from the skies.

If there is one abyss in fantasy games, though, one thing that separates the games from the literature they try to recreate, it is the lack of real moral choice in the stories that are played out during many game adventures. Either the entire issue of choosing is ignored, or the choices are so obvious that the players really have no choice.

The first problem, the total absence of moral choice, appears when players focus more on experience points, wealth, and strategy than on story content. This type of game is fine, if it is satisfying to all concerned. Consider this, though: These characters, which have been created to act in place of the players in a realm the players can never reach, often are engaged in activities that might disturb real people. They trespass on private property; they kill living, thinking beings; they take what is not rightfully theirs and often without even considering what they are doing or why they are doing it, except that it gets them (i.e., the players) ahead in the game. For the players, and presumably their characters, the end justifies the means. If this is what the players truly desire, there is no problem to correct.

Most players of fantasy games, though, are quite interested in their characters as "real people." They develop detailed backgrounds for them, decide on personality types, figure out what made a character become a thief or a wizard or whatever. They are as interested in pitting their characters' personalities against the fantasy

world as they are their swords and spells. Most DMs, in turn, know this, and frequently contrive little scenarios for PCs to react to: Do they feed the starving peasant? Do they fight off the evil hunters and save the unicorn? Well, of course they do, because there isn't any other way to react and still be a halfway decent person.

Here's the problem, though: In fantasy literature, moral choice (the person-vs.-self conflict) isn't simply dropped in for flavor like some spice. It is the very meat of the recipe. To the characters in these tales, deciding on a course of action when right and wrong are at stake often is a monumental, life-changing task. This is how it should be in games, too, and unlike setting and character, it is not so well considered in the rules of most fantasy role-playing games, nor is it an easy thing to accomplish. Following are some notes about incorporating questions of morality into fantasy adventures:

**1. Every choice of a moral nature should have some sort of consequence, whether immediate or not.** If PCs have been consistently generous to the beggars in their home city, find some way for that generosity to be rewarded. It needn't come right away; in fact, the longer the reward is held off, the bigger the impact on the players of making the right choice. Likewise, choices that go against PC morality should have consequences, too. Keep in mind that players might enjoy purposely having their characters make the wrong choice now and then, since this adds to the story and to character development. (At least one TSR product suggests applying consequences to good or evil acts: the DRAGONLANCE® Adventures hardcover for the original AD&D game.)

**2. Make the choice a genuine one.** Don't create situations where the expected "correct" decision is clear and obvious to all. As an example, recall Bilbo's choice to steal the Arkenstone from his companions and give it to the unified force of Elves and Lakemen. Bilbo risks his friendships to do the right thing. Making the right choice often involves risk and sacrifice.

**3. Don't offer money as the only reward for PC adventuring.** If your players love fantasy, you can find some issue that will motivate them to act on their own, whether it is the harming of the innocent, the abuse of power, the suffering of the masses, or the destruction of nature. Your players will enjoy themselves a lot more, and become more emotionally involved in the game.

**4. Have players explain their choices.** To improve the role-playing involved with morality decisions, encourage each player to briefly tell why her character makes a certain decision when right or wrong seems to be at issue. This will help the player in question realize what she is doing, and will possibly stimulate conversation on the topic with the other players.

**5. Do not allow evil-aligned PCs in your**

*campaign.* If there is one underlying theme of fantasy literature, it is that evil fails eventually. Evil characters always make the wrong choice on issues of morality. Any fantasy game that attempts to bring fantasy literature to life will support good-aligned characters and discourage evil ones.

6. *Realize that NPCs frequently are involved in their own inner conflicts.* Think about Darth Vader in *Return of the Jedi* (to use a science-fantasy example). We think of him as a static character who has his mind made up, right up to the second before he tosses the Emperor to his doom, saving his son's life. What is our natural reaction? We cheer, at least inwardly, because he did what we hope we would have done in his place.

Moral choice is no easy thing to incorporate into a fantasy game campaign—but without it, you'll never even get close to experiencing the satisfaction that the literature brings.

## Theme

Unlike character, setting, and conflict theme is a concept that is a little hard to define and discuss concretely. When I was attempting to convey the idea of theme to eighth-graders during my student teaching, I began with fables. We would read the fables and then talk about the “moral” that was always printed at the end. Theme, I told them, was like the moral of a fable. It is what the author is trying to say about the world by telling a particular story. As my students got more comfortable with the idea of theme, we moved on to reading fables that did not reveal the moral in so many words. The students would then attempt to write their interpretation of the “moral-less” tales. The result was that students were able to put themselves in the place of the author and figure out what the lesson of the fable was supposed to be.

What if we tried the same experiment with your standard FRPG adventure? If we looked at it objectively and tried to determine the “moral” of the story it tells, we might come up with a list like this:

—Might makes right.

—Kill first, and don't bother asking questions later.

—The end justifies the means, unless the means justifies the end.

Fantasy literature, on the other hand, almost always tries to teach lessons like these:

—The powerful are not always right.

—There are two sides to every story.

—Do the right thing, the right way.

—Personal beliefs outweigh the society's laws.

—Individual desires must be put aside for the common good.

Is it any wonder that players of fantasy games come up short when trying for the feeling they have when they read fantasy literature?

Following are more commonplace

themes of fantasy literature, examples, and ideas for employing them in a game.

1. *All that glitters is not gold.* This is a fairly simple, universal theme, also known as the “appearance vs. reality” theme. The classic example is the One Ring, surely as deadly and corrupting as it is beautiful.

This theme is quite readily useful in gaming. PCs can be presented with seemingly insane hermits who accurately predict the future, gold-filled rooms that are death traps, and cursed magical items that seem valuable. However, this theme is so common in many campaigns that PCs will always believe the insane hermit and avoid the obvious treasure—so you may want to try reversing the theme: “Some things that glitter actually are gold.” Try the insane hermit approach—but make his prophesies wildly inaccurate, for a change of pace.

The appearance-vs.-reality theme is useful in adventures that deal with illusionists, shapechanging monsters, charms, highly charismatic villains, and quests involving valuable objects.

2. *United we stand, divided we fall.* In fantasy literature it is frequently the case that the main characters must unite disparate groups. In the *DRAGONLANCE Chronicles*, Laurana's leadership skills were put to the test as she tried to rally the forces of good. In *The Hobbit*, the Wood Elves, the Lakemen, and the Thorin's band of dwarves would have been destroyed had they not been able to set aside their differences to work against the Goblins.

In fantasy games, this theme comes up when PCs work for the good of the group rather than for themselves, or when the need arises to convince feuding parties to make peace or defend each other.

3. *Diversity wins over conformity.* This is the flip side of the previous theme, for it emphasizes the need for many kinds of talents and points of view in the world. The Fellowship of the Ring (from the *Lord of the Rings*) and the Companions (from the *DRAGONLANCE Saga*, attest to the existence of this in fantasy literature.

Players of fantasy games need no convincing of the truth of this when it comes to their own parties, because FRPGs are set up to support the need for balanced groups of adventurers with lots of different skills. When dealing with the standard villain races, however, PCs could stand a lesson in tolerance and acceptance. On the other hand, these villain races often fail at their objectives precisely due to the fact that they squash differences among themselves and breed a uniformity that, ultimately, can be overcome by diversity.

To make individuality and diversity a real issue in the game, being different has to hurt a little, as it sometimes does in real life. Only then can the acceptance of one's unique contributions seem like a real accomplishment.

4. *Allies are a tremendous source of power.* Think of where Frodo would have been without Sam Gamgee. Imagine the

fall of the Empire in *Return of the Jedi* without the Ewoks. If players can become convinced of the veracity of this lesson (i.e., if they see it work firsthand), you'll have players who are as eager to make friends as they are to kill monsters.

5. *Power comes with a price.* This price either is a sacrifice or a responsibility. Luke Skywalker's power came only after much training, self-discipline, and self-denial. Gandalf's power came with the responsibility to care for Middle Earth. One of the very definitions of evil is raking power without also assuming the responsibilities that go with it.

Lest you think that the notion of theme is foreign to the AD&D game, I direct you to the *DRAGONLANCE Adventures* hard-cover for some themes that its authors think the DM should stress:

—Good redeems its own.

—Evil feeds upon itself.

—Good and evil must exist in contrast.

If you want to generate more themes far use in your game but are unsure of how to start, try stating themes in question format: What does it take to be a hero? What is being a man/woman/elf/dwarf/wizard all about? What do the higher powers of the universe want or need with mortals? Themes that are questions are a great way to introduce theme to the campaign without the DM needing to have all the answers at once.

If this discussion an theme is sounding like the discussion of the moral-choice conflict, that's fine, because theme and moral choice are intricately linked (just as character and conflict and setting and, as you will see, plot, all are linked). A theme is an author's statement of what she would do in the same situation—what moral choice she would make.

## Plot

Plot, simply put, is the sequence of events in a story. The perfect model for discussing plot is a journey: A character starts out somewhere, moves along, encounters people and things, does what he set out to do, and then goes home. Many fantasy stories are in fact tales of journeys—not only so that the author can show off the world he has created and have the environment interact with those characters, but because fantasy literature is often story-telling in its most pure form, and a plot about a journey is the most natural thing in the world.

There is one big reason why the plots of fantasy games cannot be created like the plots of fantasy literature: A fantasy story is created by just one person, over a long period of time, with lots of revision and crafting, while a fantasy adventure's plot is created by the DM and at least one player—spontaneously, at the same time, with sometimes purposely random events. Most gamers wouldn't have it any other way. It is no wonder that plot is hard to achieve in the game, and why most adventures involve a lot of wandering around at

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random.

Yet even in the purposeful chaos of gaming, the DM does have some control over where the story *could* go. After all, while you may not control the players or their characters, you do control the rest of the world. Your big job, then, is to make sure that the rest of the world goes on as it normally would, with or without the PCs. That way, there is always something happening (the very definition of plot), and the PCs can choose to react as they wish. The world doesn't revolve around the PCs. Give the players the feeling that the world is an active place, and that their characters can choose to jump in when and where they please.

In order to discuss some of the specifics of making plot a stronger element in fantasy adventures, we can break plot down into three parts, keeping in mind the comparison between a plot and a journey.

### Exposition

This is the beginning of the journey: who the characters are, how they know each other, and why they are making the journey in the first place. In fantasy literature, exposition is vital in creating reader interest and setting the scene. Without strong exposition, a story will fail to keep readers interested enough to make them want to finish what they've started.

Unfortunately, exposition is one of the weakest elements in a typical fantasy game adventure. At the beginning of a campaign, the characters typically are strangers who all happen to be in the same tavern at the same time. This would never work as the exposition of a fantasy tale, so why should you just accept it as part of the game?

One of the things that drew me to continue reading the DRAGONLANCE *Chronicles* trilogy through its initial pages was the fact that most of the characters clearly knew each other before the story started. I wanted to learn how they had met, and what kinds of experiences they'd had together. It is possible for your players to create characters not as isolated strangers, but as people who know each other to some degree. Not all the characters need to know all the other characters, but as long as everyone knows at least one other character from some past experience, no matter how minor it might seem, you have the potential for interesting relationships between the members of a PC party.

It works like this: Everyone generates their characters normally, recording ability scores, race, gender, and class. All of this information is given to the DM, who then decides which characters know each other—but not how they know each other. He lets the players decide this in secret, allowing them to come up with the relevant details and also allowing them to choose what they reveal about their characters' relationships to the rest of the group.

Here's an example, using the following characters:

—Aelyra, a chaotic good female elf fighter/mage.

—Baz, a chaotic neutral male half-elf bard.

—Corin, a lawful neutral male dwarf fighter.

—Devilon, a neutral female human wizard.

The DM decides that Baz knows Aelyra, Corin knows Baz, and Devilon knows Aelyra. Individually and secretly, the players of these characters decide on the details of their past relationships. Baz and Aelyra, it is decided, are half-siblings, with a common father. This makes Baz a bastard and an embarrassment to Aelyra's family, so they choose to keep this relationship a secret. Corin and Baz worked together recently as caravan guards, and their players don't bother to keep this a secret. The players of Aelyra and Devilon decide their characters were trained in magic at the same academy, and again this is made common knowledge. Now the players have a little information with which to role-play their characters, and the DM has some facts he can use to generate future adventures with.

Having characters share past experiences helps create conflict—the kind of conflict without which stories cannot exist. Following is a list of several kinds of relationships for PCs, and some possible conflicts that might come with them:

Exposition needn't be something to wade through or tolerate before the real fun begins—it provides a conflict that makes the story worth experiencing.

### Climax

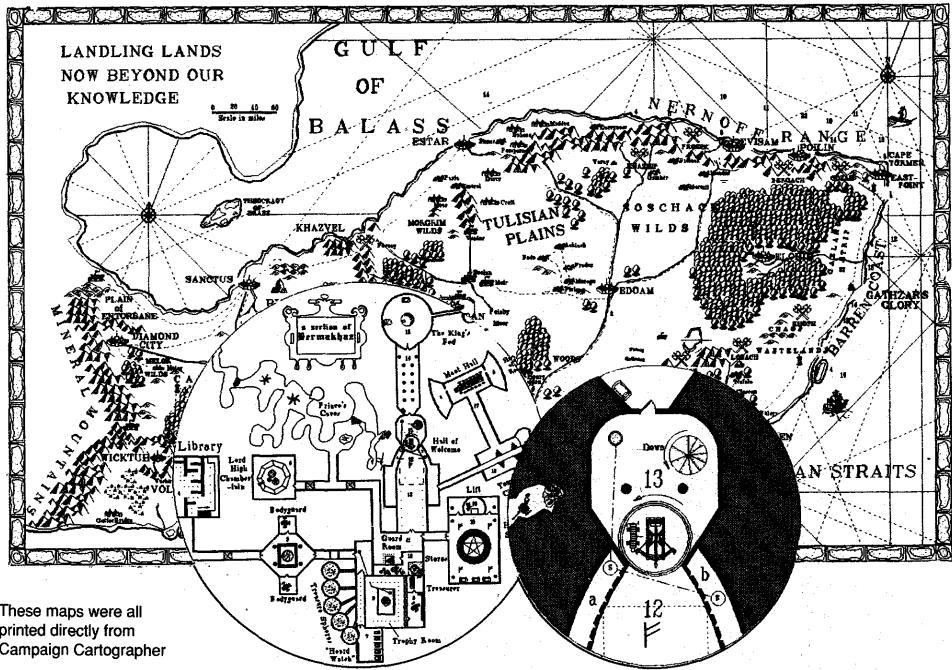
This is the point of the journey. It is what the whole trip has built up to. It also is a story element that most DMs are fairly comfortable with. Climaxes come in many sizes and intensities. In Tolkien's trilogy, for example, Frodo's escape from the ring-wraiths into Rivendell is thoroughly exciting, but a small climax compared to Gandalf's unsuccessful confrontation with the Balrog in the dwarven halls; this in turn is relatively minor when considered against the books concluding battle in which the Fellowship is broken and Boromir is slain.

Generally, the climax to a standard game adventure is a fight with the biggest, baddest monster or NPC around in order to complete the goal of the story. That's not a bad thing, because FRPGs are built around that person-vs.-person conflict. Here are some options to consider, though, which could improve the climaxes of your game adventures:

First, let the PCs think they know what the climax is going to be, and then change it. Let the characters think they are going to spy on the prince and learn some dirt

*Continued on page 22*

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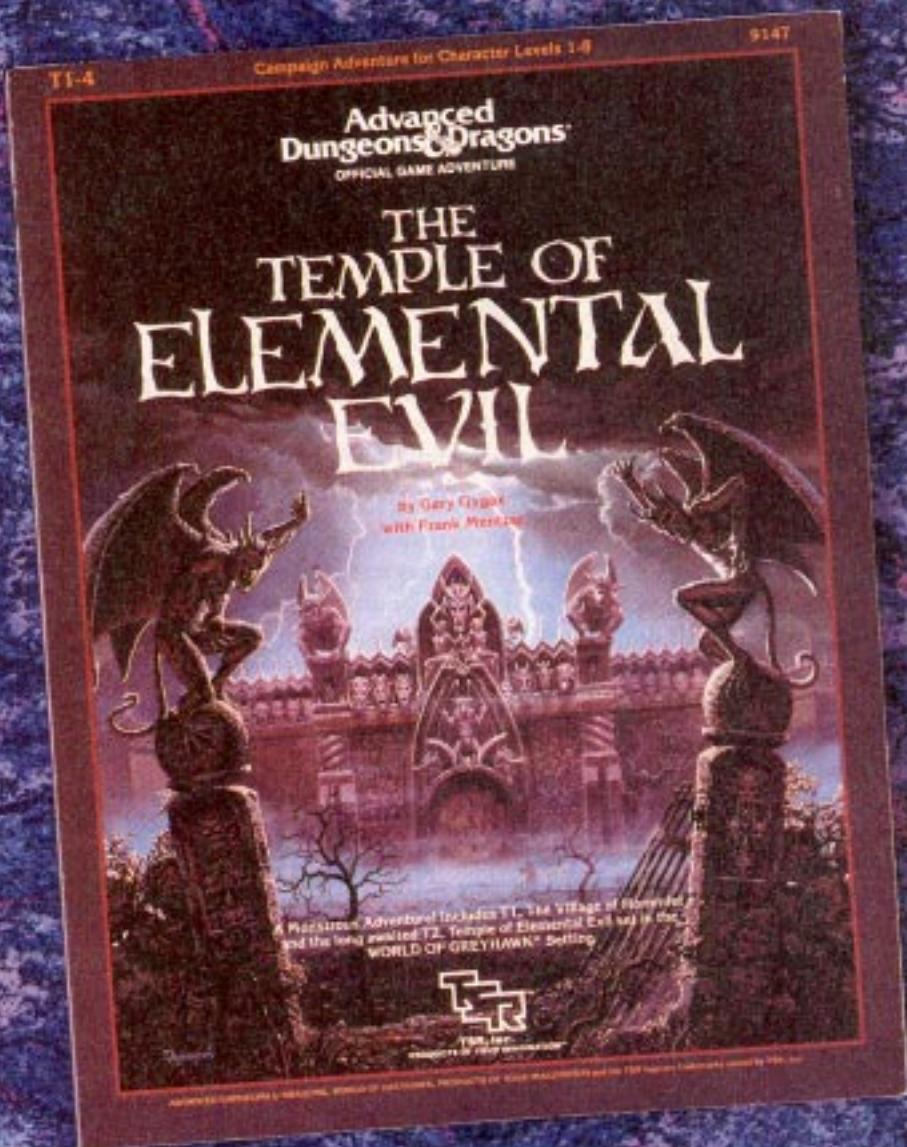
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# Adventures that Improve with Age

Everybody loves reruns. Whether it's a favorite movie or a particular episode of *MASH*, *Cheers*, or *Star Trek* we want to watch them again and again. There is an emotional tie to these works of fiction, something we strongly identify with. And, no matter how many times we've seen these reruns, we still feel good about settling onto the couch for one more viewing.

It's the same with favorite game adventures. Whether we had a beloved character who garnered wealth and fame during the ultimate quest, or as the DM we enjoyed challenging our players with every conceivable plot and subplot, there is that special adventure that we frequently look back upon with fondness and even a little bit of wistfulness. What we really want, when all is said and done, is to go through that adventure again, just like a rerun, reliving the thrills and excitement and hoping that the second time will be as cool as the first. But, as most of you know who have thought about replaying an adventure (or maybe in some form or another actually tried it), it doesn't often work out nearly as well as you want it to. The reasons for this are twofold.

The first difficulty involved in rerunning an adventure is logistical in nature. Either you are still gaming with the same group of players that you were with the first time the adventure was run, or (if you are like me and you've moved away and have a

new group) it's a published adventure and some of the players in your current group have been through it before. Either way, the thrill of the unknown within this adventure is spoiled.

The second problem with using an adventure again is an emotional one. No matter how hard you may try, there is no way you are ever going to recapture the exact feelings of exhilaration you felt the first time. Unlike television reruns, adventures are dynamic episodes, at the mercy and control of the players. Nobody ever does the same thing twice in an adventure rerun. The first time through was a unique experience, and trying to duplicate it only taints the memory.

There are solutions to these problems, though, and the result can allow you to not only reuse that favorite adventure, but make your campaign a more vibrant and exciting one for having done it. This is exactly what I have accomplished with the AD&D® game supermodule *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. It's one of my favorite adventures ever published by TSR, Inc., because my most cherished and longest-lasting character made his debut there. Knowing, though, that I could never recapture the excitement of that campaign, I learned how to reuse the material in other ways. I want to share some of these methods with you, drawing upon my use of

*The Temple of Elemental Evil* to illustrate some points. If you are strictly a player and your DM either is currently running this adventure or else considering it, then you might not want to read any further—it will just spoil the surprises. (That's a hint to the people who are currently in my own gaming group—I'm planning to use all these tricks again on you.)

## Prior knowledge

As I mentioned before, the logistical problem involved in using a published adventure is centered on players who have prior knowledge. If you are still playing with the same group of people who played the adventure before, this article isn't going to help you much—but there are some good ideas in here that you still might be able to use. Perhaps you might try running a sequel or a "Return to . . ." adventure with the same material as before.

A far more common problem, though, is having a few players in a gaming group who have gone through the adventure previously. Now, it would be no fun to go ahead and run the scenario and ask the "second-timers" to pretend not to know what was going on. Gamers have a knack for becoming intimate with every secret hallway, every crafty enemy, and every treasure hoard the first time around. And of course, you don't want to exclude those players from the game; that defeats the point of playing the game.

Instead, here's a solution that will benefit everybody, including the poor harried DM. Every DM knows how hard it is to juggle several rule books, the adventure text, dice, and whatever else behind a screen while four or five players are all asking questions simultaneously. It doesn't leave much room for clever thinking on the NPCs' parts. How often do you remember—too late—that the major villain had some obscure magical item that would have made things miserable for the PCs? What the DM needs are a couple assistants. These assistants act as sidekicks, running all the NPCs in the adventure almost as their own characters. Who better to use as a sidekick than a player or two who has already experienced the adventure?

In many scenarios, the writer gives the DM some sort of background material, describing who knows whom, who is corrupt, who is likely to betray whom, and so forth. However, only this basic groundwork is usually detailed. If the DM wants to initiate behind-the-scenes activity, he must do it himself. With sidekicks, this is not only easier, but fun as well. The denizens of the adventure become dynamic individuals who no longer huddle in their encounter rooms, waiting for the characters to arrive and bash them. The sidekicks can play the NPCs to the hilt, having them purchase supplies, recruit mercenaries, make contact with other NPCs, train to rise in levels, and so forth. The results will be amazing.

Even when the gaming group isn't gathered for their regular session, the DM and sidekicks can get together and discuss motives and agendas for the NPCs based on what appears in the text and what they might do in other situations. And when the game is actually occurring, the DM can leave all the really clever thinking to his sidekicks while he concentrates on keeping the game running smoothly, adjudicating things, and keeping his records up to date. In fact, the system can work so well that the DM's records may become quite comprehensive.

For example, the DM might want to maintain a calendar to track all the important events such as repopulation rates, the arrival of important personages, the weather, and so forth. This is important for two reasons. First, being able to refer back to some obscure but suddenly important event from an earlier stage in the campaign is possible. Perhaps the DM gave a name to some unimportant NPC during a role-playing session and needs to remember that name two game-months later. Being able to find this information can be a life-saver for the DM, making him look like a genius. Second, saving all that material for the next time the DM wants to run the adventure provides a wealth of good ideas, more of which I will talk about a little later.

*The Temple of Elemental Evil* is particularly good for this kind of "DM by committee" system, because there are quite a few personalized evil NPCs within the temple who are divided into many factions, and there is a lot of infighting written into the original material. The sidekicks and the DM can sit down and make good use of this information to actually have several plot lines going at once. For example, within the temple structure itself are many factions, all with their own agendas. Some coexist together under an uneasy peace, but others are openly hostile to one another, shooting on sight, so to speak. In the game, the DM actually might have PCs stumble across forces from two opposing factions fighting one another. If they are smart, they might stay out of sight and let the NPCs do some of their work for them. On the other side of the scale, though, two or three factions, individually weakened by previous PC forays into their domains, might join forces and plot an ambush. Perhaps they will become particularly brave and counterattack the village of Hommlet (perhaps taking hostages in hopes of turning the villagers against the characters), burn the PCs' camp while they are away, and just generally make a nuisance of themselves.

Sidekicks can turn the temple denizens into much more formidable foes for the characters. You even may find that, in the end, the NPCs are actually too powerful for the characters. You must gauge the use of this system to the relative gaming experience of your players, the level of magic and treasure that you allow in the campaign, and how the original writer intend-

ed for the NPCs to behave. One thing is certain, though: Players will quickly learn to be a lot more cautious.

One thing that I should note here: To keep things fair, the DM shouldn't allow the sidekicks to know anything more about the PCs than the NPCs could find out. By doing this, the DM is keeping things a bit more impartial. It also provides the sidekicks with something of a challenge.

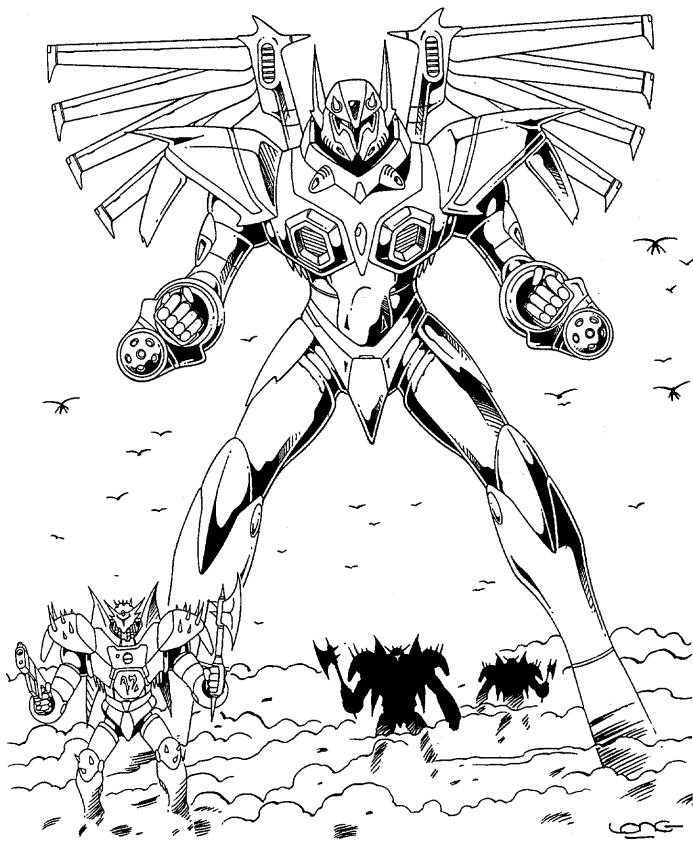
In one campaign a friend of mine ran using *The Temple of Elemental Evil* like this, his sidekicks were constantly using spies, magical divinations, and other means to try to learn more about the characters. The DM made the sidekicks occupy a separate room next to where the actual gaming took place. They could make plans and write notes, but they couldn't hear what the players were doing. During lulls in the action (such as when the players were discussing what they wanted to do next), the DM could step into the other room to update and receive plans from the other side. The only drawback to this process was that battles became extremely slow, since the moves had to be processed back and forth, but the extremely clever nature of both sides' tactics made this worthwhile.

## Expectations

As I said before, the second pitfall to rerunning an adventure is emotional in nature. You never can go back and experience again just how it felt to survive that deadly dungeon with your favorite character. The biggest reason for this is that no two groups of players are going to react to circumstances within the adventure in quite the same way.

For example, I recall Dale Donovan's Editorial in DRAGON® issue #172 that described Dale trying to run an encounter in Sherwood Forest, where the characters actually got to meet Robin Hood, and how it failed. Dale went on to say that players generally don't react well to getting robbed, regardless of whether or not the head bandit is a dashing fellow who is really serving the needs of the poor. Most players draw their swords first and ask questions later. As a result, I suspect that he found trying to run a Sherwood Forest encounter not only unsuccessful, but depressing as well. Imagine watching as your group of players completely botch in one gaming session the key scenes from one of your favorite stories.

Similarly, you can't force one gaming group to recreate what another gaming group did in the past. You can, however, borrow the details from the previous group and incorporate them into your own campaign. This is where keeping those detailed records can come in handy. I'll cite a prime example from my own experiences. The first time I went through *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, it was as a player. The group of people I gamed with particularly enjoyed the long-term feel of this campaign, so our characters really got



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involved with activities beyond the dungeon door. Two of our characters pooled their resources and contracted a shipyard to build us a small ship, which we then used to start our own shipping company. We opened a store in Nulb, a town near the temple itself, where we sold all the excess equipment and weapons we were finding in the dungeons (and if you are familiar with this module, you know there is a lot). We discovered an abandoned farmhouse in the woods near the temple and ended up turning it into a fortified base of operations. First we built a palisade wall around the place. Then we invented a system of lights that used cloaked rocks with *continual light* spells cast upon them that could be uncovered from one central location—in effect, a complete set of floodlights that we could “turn on” when we needed the whole compound lit at night (such as when we were attacked).

In the end, we had made the world really feel like our own and had the sense that we had left our mark upon it. The shipping company was successful enough that we actually branched out into several related industries and became business tycoons. Of course, we hired competent henchmen to actually run the businesses—our characters were still busy adventuring.

The problem for me has always been that each time I've run the campaign my-

self, my players don't respond the same way I did when I played through it. Most of them check the farmhouse once and then forget about it. I always feel a little let down when they don't jump on the opportunity the way my group did. I've learned, though, that I can still have the fun of seeing this little event come to fruition. I simply introduce a group of NPC adventurers who show up to loot the temple, becoming competition for my players' characters. In this way, I can relive a little of the thrill I remembered from the first time, without dictating how the players should approach the campaign world. It's actually a lot of fun to have the PCs interacting with those old characters and not realize who they are.

An alternative way to introduce previous campaign characters is to have them act as mentors to the current batch. When it's time to go for training, you already have a nice, seasoned group of NPCs who fit the bill as teachers. Perhaps you can even set up the campaign so that each of the current characters actually serves some higher figure and has an additional agenda. (This also becomes a convenient reason to explain why absent players' characters are away for a while.)

You don't have to limit this recycling to characters, either. Anything that happened before can happen again, although perhaps it will be triggered by a different set

of events. For example, in our original campaign, a war erupted in the region around the temple, due primarily to petty politics among the good countries. Those nations' inability to quell their differences made them weak against the power of the evil temple. Because of this, our characters were drawn away from the temple for a time to deal with other problems, and several of the powerful temple leaders almost managed to release the fiend trapped in the lowest levels. I am incorporating many of the same events into my own campaign, even though there is no information in the original text itself about this occurring. It's a cool idea, and allowing the PCs to witness such dynamic activity gives them a certain impetus to prevent disaster from striking.

In essence, then, it is not impossible to reuse an adventure as it might seem. The trick is to devote a little time and dedication to some planning and clever thinking. If you are willing to spend the time doing this, you can again experience the wonders of that favorite adventure, and maybe even have it turn out better the second time around. Making a favorite campaign a dynamic, interactive rerun will certainly thrill your players and keep them on their toes, and they will love you for it. Maybe they will go on to use those same ideas in their next campaign.

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## Hitting the Books

*Continued from page 16*

about him, but have them end up discovering that there is something not human taking the prince's place. Let them think rescuing the merchant's daughter will be the climax, when in fact convincing her to leave her new home is the real task. Then, when the characters have reached what they think is the pinnacle of excitement, really let them have it. Give them one more obstacle to overcome, and one more monster to evade or fight, and then just one more stuck door or deadly trap, so they are straining and on the edge of their abilities. That's what excitement is all about. Authors of fantasy literature never let their heroes emerge clean and victorious. They only get one or the other.

### Resolution

This is the part of the plot that should be most enjoyable: It is returning home from the long journey, reflecting on what has happened along the way. Like exposition, resolution often gets skipped over in the rush to divvy up the loot. If you have been taking care to incorporate inner conflict and theme into your adventures, resolution is payoff time, the chance to see the effect that heroism had on the world and to feel the satisfaction of coming out a winner.

At the end of each individual adventure, the DM should spend time with her players and discuss what they think their characters learned during the adventure, what they are likely to remember, and what influenced them the most. This is as rewarding a time for the players and the DM as it is for the characters who lived the story you've created.

Wrapping up an entire campaign is another matter entirely. A campaign is a series of stories, all connected by the characters and the setting. Unfortunately, most campaigns end up in one of two very unsatisfying ways: either with the sudden, useless deaths of the characters without their resolving whatever adventure they were in the midst of when they died, or with the players getting tired of doing the “same old thing” and simply setting their experienced characters aside without fanfare.

My suggestion for resolution of whole campaigns is a kind of “farewell” adventure, rather like the final episode of a beloved television show. This works out best if it is done before the players are thoroughly tired of their characters but realize that the end will be coming soon. It is up to the DM to create one last tale that will incorporate favorite NPCs, locations,

themes, and conflicts that have presented themselves along the way. At the end of this last adventure, the players and the DM can experience the sense of closure that comes at the end of a good fantasy literature series: a feeling of completeness and wholeness, and the satisfaction of a job well done.

### Speaking of resolution . . .

The elements of literature that make fantasy stories so satisfying that we actually want to experience what the heroes experience are elements that can, to some degree, be added to any fantasy game that is lacking in depth. If you have read this article and find that everything seems to be blurring together, that's good: Setting and character cannot exist without plot, and conflict cannot exist without character, and theme cannot exist without conflict. They are all part of one whole: the story. If your goal in playing fantasy games is to be a part of a grand story of magic and heroism, it will only work if all the parts are there.

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**D**o your AD&D® or D&D® game adventures end this way, like the story of Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty? Do your players clamor for you to give them a full-bodied campaign where the adventures proceed in a seamless whole? Does the task daunt you? If you're not certain how or where to begin, consider that the difference between a fairy tale and real life lies in considering what happens next.

"Sleeping Beauty," the adventure described above, is a fairy tale. Real life is dealing with a bride and a horde of in-laws and servants a hundred years out of date in everything from current events to fashion. Real life is a castle that's moldered for a century and a fief that's been uninhabited just as long. If you put your characters in Prince Charming's boots, they'll have their work cut out for them, but they'll also find themselves embarked on a terrific campaign.

The principle to turning a series of un-linked adventures into a campaign that will challenge, frustrate, and entertain players by making their characters' lives more realistic is simple: All actions must have consequences.

Think back on your group's previous adventures to identify potential consequences to drop on them now. For instance, a DM I know once took his adventurers through the upper levels of module WG7 *Castle Greyhawk*, before other campaign events called them away. Some time later, however, the PCs found themselves surrounded by a group of angry druids who demanded they return to Castle Greyhawk to repair the environmental damage they'd caused. Baffled by the charge, the characters denied responsibility. The druids were firm, describing the vast, sticky-sweet swamp centered around the castle. At last someone remembered the *decanter of endless lemonade* that they'd found on Level 3 and lost the stopper to; rather than hunt for the cork—as the writer of the adventure intended for them to do—they tossed the *decanter* aside and left the castle.

# Consequences

## What happens *after* the adventure?

by Renee Stern

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

### Revenge

Perhaps the easiest tool DMs can use with this principle is revenge. Did the PCs once defeat a group of bandits? Even bad guys have families. The characters might be relaxing in their favorite tavern, telling stories about their exploits, when one of the brigand's daughters—or husband or mother or even a whole clan of relatives—bursts in and demands satisfaction.

Such a confrontation need not be outright. Imagine the vengeful relative stalking the PCs, waiting for the perfect moment for an ambush. The cannier opponents will wait until the characters find a large treasure and defeat its guardians before revealing themselves.

Not all revenge-seekers will be fighters. They may be too weak to accomplish the deed themselves, but could be wealthy or powerful enough to hire assassins or thugs. Thieves make bad enemies, as do mages.

For that matter, revenge need not be limited to bloodshed or material losses. I once annoyed my players with a young thief who began his quest for revenge by trying to destroy the PCs' reputations. He spread nasty rumors through the city and plagued them with vicious pranks, including gluing swords into sheaths, cutting saddle straps almost through, and drenching their gear with stable leavings. It would have escalated to violence, but the group gave him the slip. Still, they know he's out there somewhere, trying to track them down yet and make them pay for destroying his family.

Families aren't the only option when it comes to retribution. Just as any group of PCs will stick tightly to the trail of a villain who killed a comrade, bad guys (in the

sense that they oppose the characters, not that they're necessarily evil) will have close friends of their own. Perhaps the victims belonged to an organization that will try to punish their murderers. After a few too many encounters with wererats in one city, my players later discovered that other groups of wererats had been furnished with Wanted posters of their PCs, and the monsters' quest for revenge eventually led the PCs into a confrontation with the queen of the wererats.

Don't overuse revenge, however. Not every defeated foe merits this treatment. Vary the circumstances and the timing. News can travel painfully slowly in a world with medieval-level technology, even one with the benefit of magic. And even when word does fly back, the vengeful still may need time to track down the PCs or even to grow up enough to make the challenge.

### Romance

Romance is another useful tool, particularly if one or more of the PCs likes to flirt. You can liven up what otherwise might be a slow time in town with jealous lovers or protective families. What parents want their babies involved with unreliable wanderers almost certain to meet a violent end in the near future?

Flirtatious interest, on the other hand, may enmesh a character in the prospect of a hasty marriage. Adventurers, after all, are fantastically wealthy compared to the average NPC, and their hazardous lifestyles may appeal to the greedy. Alternatively, the shy cobbler may want only to share the reflected glory of a wife who's a hero. Whatever the reason, though, don't

force the relationship on a character permanently; let him panic a bit, but always offer a way out. Ideally, this ploy should lead to a new adventure, or at least some inspired role-playing.

Adventurers should find that their deeds lead to their veneration by ordinary folks, at least some of the time. Occasionally, take it beyond respectfully yielding seats by the tavern's hearth to the PCs, or asking their advice about a local affair, and set up a situation where the common folk fawn over the PCs. Hero-worship is fun and ego-building for the heroes up to a point, but what if an overzealous supporter speaks out at the wrong time and entangles the group in an adventure in which they had absolutely no interest?

With lovers, would-be and otherwise, and admirers, characters must take care not to offend the wrong families. Hero-worshippers are the obvious choice for apprentices, squires, and other henchmen, but do your players want to risk having their characters lead the mayor's nephew to his death? Imagine having to explain to the only armorer in town that his younger sister was eaten by orcs.

Refusing to take on henchmen carries its own perils, especially if a quick-tempered relative misunderstands. "Are you saying my son isn't good enough to join your flea-ridden band?" packs quite a punch when backed either by the baron's squad of guards or a smiths bulging muscles.

On the other hand, befriending the right people can bear unexpected rewards. Taking care of the drunks harassing the innkeeper's daughter may lead to a free meal, or preference for the only private room, or even inside information needed for an upcoming adventure. The old man they save from goblins as he hurries home through the woods may be a simple peddler. Or he may be a minor sage who offers the one-time use of his services in gratitude.

Characters who flaunt their wealth are certain to draw plenty of unscrupulous types, from the expected cutpurses to con artists with hard-luck stories and schemers with chancy investment offers.

If the PCs achieve a major success, they should draw at least one group of rivals, probably more. These NPCs will follow them everywhere, searching for information to improve their own chances of success and trying to prevent the characters from winning the next round.

Also, don't forget that stepping outside the law, no matter what the temptation, brings its own dangerous consequences.

## Politics

Almost any campaign is bound to involve politics, even if it's only disputes between the mayor and the head priest on how best to run the town. What's more, politics in a fantasy world with access to assassins, poison, and magic should be anything but tedious.

Making political enemies leads back to

revenge possibilities, but don't stop there. If the characters support the wrong claimant to a disputed title, they might end up in exile or joining a rebellion. False accusations about their loyalty or even a misguided interpretation of their actions can force them into new adventures to prove themselves on the side of right.

PCs who rid an area of a threat such as a group of bandits or a clan of gnolls may believe they're entitled to a reward, but not if the local lord relied on the monsters to keep his border secure or hold a rival group in check. Not only will the party earn a noble's displeasure, but now they have a new threat to deal with as well.

Also in the category of deceptive appearances is someone the characters once saved from danger who is hiding something. What would be a properly heroic act under other circumstances eventually causes unintended misery if the rescued woman is a spy or the leader of an evil cult.

Many of the same devices mentioned in connection with ordinary NPCs become political when the characters mingle with the powerful. They may encounter rivals for the duke's favor, which they must gain in order to be allowed to quest in his lands. Refusing a flirtatious prince may force a quick exit from the area. Gossiping to the wrong person may spark a power struggle or give a rival region an unintentional advantage.

Ignoring or slighting the wrong people will cause plenty of headaches. My players once acquired a trophy red dragon skin from a long-abandoned and monster-infested castle. After hauling it back to civilized lands they eventually decided to make a gift of it to the king, thereby winning his favor. Unfortunately, the head of the local mages' guild wanted it for her own research and was more than miffed that the party bestowed it elsewhere.

What's worse, the same king forgot the PCs' generosity when they refused to accede to his whim. A fanatic when it came to collecting exotic animals, he took a fancy to the wizards pseudo-dragon familiar. Quick thinking got them out of their predicament and into a new adventure by promising to find a suitably unusual beast for his menagerie.

## Magic

Magic carries its own hazards when the PCs have to live with the consequences. While spells with the greatest impact tend to be higher in level, a bit of creativity might unearth other possibilities.

A *move earth* spell might enrage a local religious group if it interferes with a sacred site. That *earthquake* might have seemed like a good idea when the PCs assaulted an enemy stronghold, but what if when the dust settles they find they've dammed a river or buried the entrance to a profitable mine? And an *earthquake* unknowingly centered on a fault line will cause widespread disaster.

Weather-control spells might work by importing the desired effects from a nearby spot, causing drought or flooding there. *Control winds* can cause gusts strong enough to flatten the crops in farmers' fields, level forests, or leave villagers without shelter. Incendiary spells can get out of hand easily and spark wildfires that destroy crops, bridges, and settlements. The more powerful cold spells, used in the wrong place, might simulate the effects of an inopportune frost on the local food supply. PCs should never underestimate the power of a large enough group of 0-level humans; even if the locals don't attack, they can make life very unpleasant by withholding supplies or spreading the story of the PCs' incompetence to a wider audience.

Leftover magical traps of various kinds, from *hallucinatory terrain* to *glyphs of warding* or *fire traps*, which last until set off or dispelled, are deadly hazards to locals who stumble on them. Even if the PCs aren't to blame for a particular trap, they may suffer anyway if they're known to be lax about cleaning up after themselves.

Magic also works to the party's benefit, such as when adventuring priests win villagers' trust with generous use of healing spells or magic such as *create food and water*. This trust might later be life-saving if the characters are fleeing a hostile force and need a refuge.

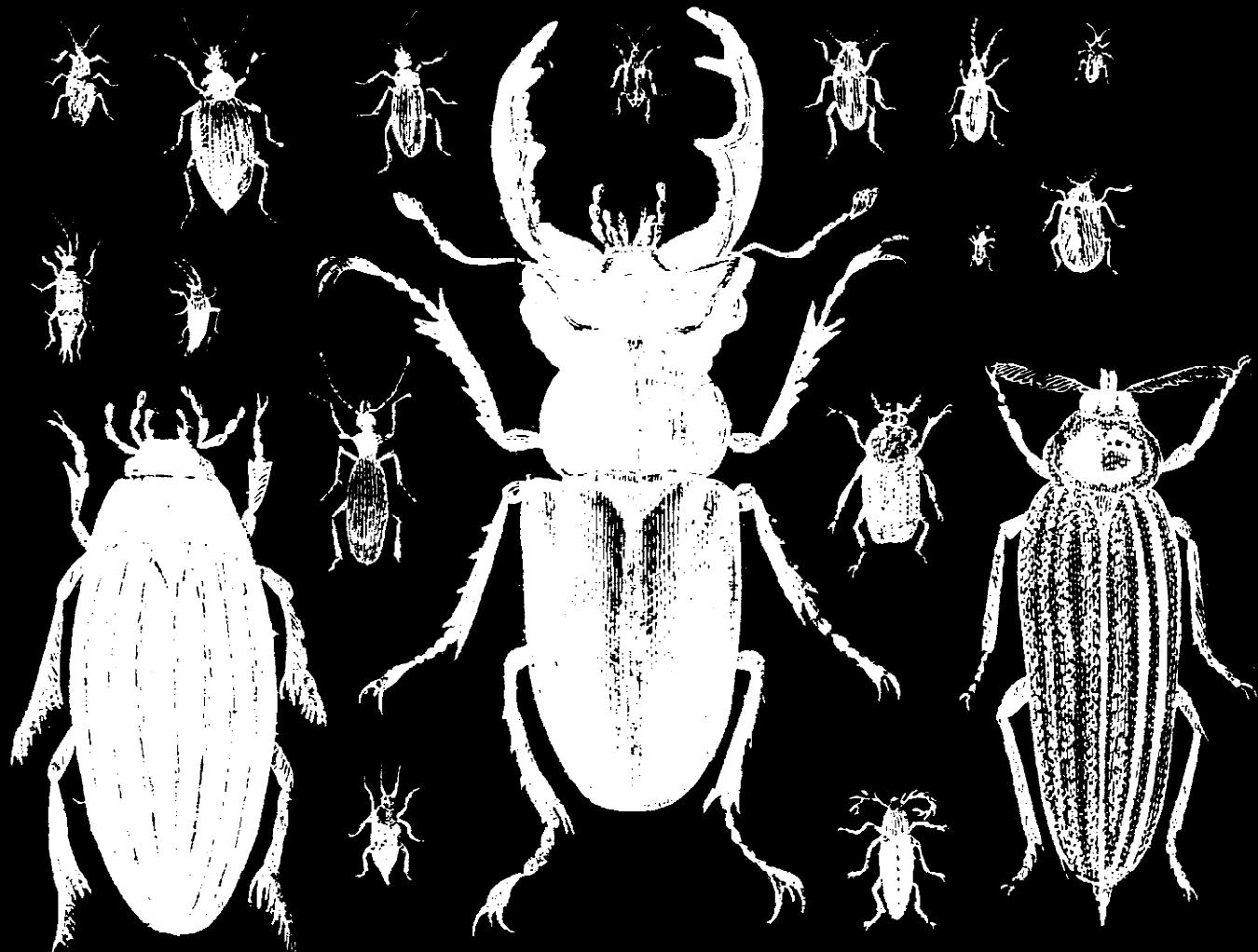
Indiscriminate use of magical items also can come back to haunt the PCs. A *horn of blasting* or *decanter of endless water* might level the wrong buildings or flood the wrong areas.

Another possibility for magic lies in research. If the party's mage, after devoting long hours and huge sums of gold, develops a new spell, word eventually will filter into the magical community. Some people will ask politely to learn from the researcher, some will use strong persuasion, and some will try to take the knowledge for themselves. Who deserves this information and who will use it safely? If the spell is offensively powerful or serves as a defense against a previously unstoppable threat, the party may start the fantasy equivalent of an arms race. Finding a long-unknown spell while adventuring could trigger the same events.

## Economics

Economic consequences are found almost everywhere, because money is a powerful motivating force. Everyone has to eat, after all, and except for clerics, food isn't free. Put another way, every action causes some financial effect.

If your adventurers are explorers, finding new lands or making the wilderness safe for civilization to move in, they'll almost certainly trigger a frontier rush. Just as in the Old West, boom towns will be rough, perhaps practically lawless, and prices for imported goods—which in the beginning means anything except raw



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materials—will be astronomical. Meanwhile, back in more settled lands, price structures will be upset as raw materials pour in and the able-bodied follow opportunities on the frontier. If your campaign area has developed along feudal lines, nobles will find their estates diminishing as their serfs run off; even if they don't blame the PCs, this assault on the social structure should cause its own ripples in the campaign.

Looking further, perhaps the hobgoblins the PCs destroyed were the only local source for a vital commodity. Prices will skyrocket until a new supplier can be found and the scarcity ends. (Finding a new source might become the group's next quest, if the goods are important enough.) Defeating monsters that are the sole local source of a magical component could backfire on the adventurers, particularly if alternate components prove hazardous in use.

Returning from an adventure with unusual items, such as griffon eggs or giant dragonfly wings, might start a fad among the wealthy and powerful. A lucrative business might develop to satisfy the demand, but the characters almost certainly will have to deal with competitors. Cut-throat business practices take on an entirely new meaning in a fantasy game.

Exploring new lands also can develop into a business if the PCs stumble on a new commodity that they then try to keep

as a monopoly. Silk, tea, and spices are real-world examples of rare goods once prized at least as highly as gold. Complications follow if they try to keep their trade route a secret.

Other business opportunities that make use of labor- or time-saving magic will only fill the PCs' purses until out-of-work competitors organize opposition. Spells or magical items that substitute for diggers or construction workers are one area to watch out for, but even a simple *mend* spell, if used too often, might anger the local tailors, cobblers, and tinkers.

I once treated my PCs to an amulet that turned water into mead, a magical trinket they truly enjoyed. Although they never pursued their talk of opening a business with it, if they had done this they soon would have run into trouble from the other brewers in town who obviously couldn't meet the mead-makers' bargain prices.

PCs who try to protect their purses by utilizing illusory coins such as *fools' gold* may find the trick works occasionally, but eventually their misdeeds, and the cheated merchants, will catch up to them.

Finally, although defeating a dragon is every adventurer's dream, that heroic deed also can have unexpected consequences. If the wyrm's lair blocks a mountain pass, for instance, removing the monster might open trade between two

once-isolated regions. Caravans not only offer jobs as guards, but also bring in new ideas and customs—some innovative, some disruptive, many both.

And what if the dragon kept the two regions at peace by blocking the only invasion path? Characters toasted as heroes one day may quickly find themselves the targets of blame when war follows.

Confronting PCs with the consequences of their deeds quickly leads to a campaign where the seeds of one adventure are found in the meat of an earlier one. Players find their characters becoming true personalities as they learn to consider and accept the consequences of their actions, and DMs find that applying this simple principle sparks their creativity in designing new adventures.

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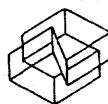
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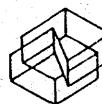
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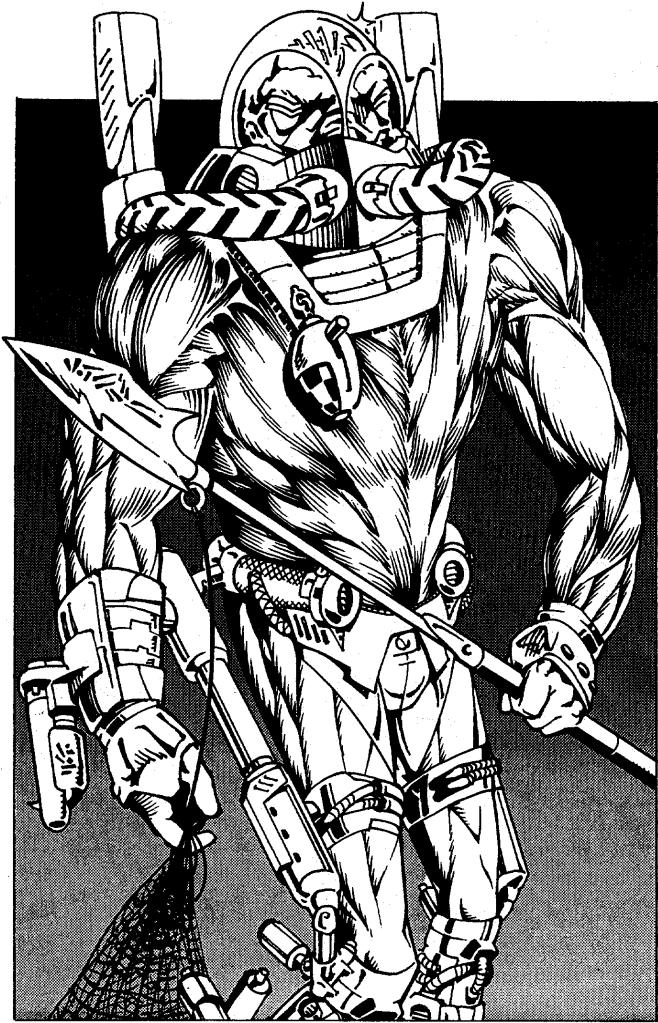
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# Tricks of the Trade

by George T. Young

Artwork by Joseph Pillsbury

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## The storytelling game master

DMs: Imagine the following chain of events in the creation of an adventure. You want the players to conduct a raid on a castle, filled (surprisingly enough) with magical traps and monsters. You design the castle, along with several subterranean dungeon levels. Next, you add in some particularly nasty traps. You place monsters in various rooms, selecting each one carefully for the challenge that it will offer the player characters. Then you come up with the strength of the castle's garrison, their skills and special abilities, and figure out what tactics and positions they will use against the party. Oh, and don't forget to throw in some ballistae along the battlements for good measure. Finally, you decide where you want the castle to be located. You're all set.

When the players arrive and everyone is ready, you say, "So you want to attack this castle . . ."

Ouch. Obviously, the scene is exaggerated; most DMs put more work into the set-up of an adventure than that. But it is often true that most of the work that goes into an adventure is simply its physical structure and the combat situations it offers, rather than the role-playing opportunities the scenario could have. There are other ways to handle the job, however.

The role of the DM is more than simple refereeing; she has to create a plausible

series of events, a story of sorts, out of the actions of the player characters. The rules may differ greatly with the game system you're using, but the role is always the same: the good DM is a storyteller.

It's not an easy task. Many adventures are created because the DM simply has found a new monster type that he wants to throw at the party, or has a great idea for a dungeon design, or just wants to try out a particular situation. Those are all good ways to start, but the designing shouldn't stop there. This article aims to provide DMs with ideas about how to introduce storytelling to their campaigns, a way of creating a sense of continuity between adventures.

### Nothing happens in a vacuum

Even in a fantasy role-playing game, happenings need to have some sort of consistent logic behind them; if there is a huge dungeon below the city, then somebody must have built it. The same goes for the above example. The DM's castle was built where it was for a reason. Almost any reason you choose to have it there will be good enough: it used to defend the frontier, it guarded a vital pass or trade route, or it was the stronghold of the old Count. Any of these reasons will do; they provide a starting point for the DMs' imagination.

Having thought up a reason for why the site of the adventure is where it is and exists the way it does, you can develop a short history of the place for the players to discover. This adds a little bit of flavor to the adventure, and the campaign in turn, merely by making the campaign world more concrete. Dungeons with a history to them lose some of their feeling of generic blandness.

Things happen all the time in the real world; history marches on, whether it affects the PCs directly or not. The campaign world should have new events that occur that change the world subtly, or perhaps not so subtly. Maybe a revolution has started somewhere, or a city that the PCs had been to years before was destroyed by a magical catastrophe. The world should always be in motion, making the PCs' lives more interesting and believable between cavern crawls. The party can meet travelers on the road who speak of a great fire in the central grasslands which is driving them out of their homes, and it doesn't have anything to do with the adventure at all. The party isn't expected to act on everything that they run into or hear about; sometimes you, as the DM, should throw in little snippets of totally irrelevant material, merely for the sake of giving your players a feel that the world turns on, with or without their characters.

The worst example of a Dungeon Master

letting his players live in a vacuum is the case of the party that manages to slay a dragon and return with part of its treasure to the city, then proceeds to cash in the gold and gems, train for new levels with the experience gained, and then eventually return to the lair, which no one else has touched, and pick up the rest of the loot! Not only is a story lacking in that scenario, the sense of logic is completely missing, too. Why hadn't anyone else thought to cash in on the party's actions and help themselves to the unguarded horde?

The more the Dungeon Master paints the campaign world as a place where effects always have their causes, the more the players can believe in the story. It's more fun to read a good story than a bad one, just as it's more fun to play one. Besides keeping track of the mundane effects that the party has on the campaign world, the DM also should manage the more extraordinary, unforeseen effects.

What if the PCs kill one of the campaign's major villains? Say, for example, that the party succeeds in defeating a powerful wizard from ancient times who leads a secret world-wide organization. Many DMs would use the surviving henchmen of the dead NPC for future "revenge-seeking" adventures, but what about the other possible consequences? The secret organization falls into disorder as its mem-

bers all scramble for power at once, and the end result is that splinter factions develop, each of which hates all the other groups, while still being evil and still working against the forces of good.

The PCs would be very puzzled indeed if they came upon a melee going on between two groups of the dead wizard's forces, each intent on destroying the other. What if one of the groups turned to the party for aid against their foes? The PCs would be fighting evil, after all, even as they were aiding a different evil, but they would have to wonder how such a strange situation ever developed. It is up to you, as the DM, to provide "wrinkles" in the campaign that the players' imaginations can latch on to.

### Recurring characters

Every good story has main characters: those in the AD&D® game are the PCs, whether there are two of them or 12. The party is on a series of continuing adventures, seeking fame and fortune in the world (and sometimes beyond it). The problem that can arise in many campaigns is the constant flow of different NPCs. How many bartenders, city guards, temple priests, and sages has your party met over the course of their adventuring careers? The smart DM is one who doesn't forget about his old, well-used NPCs. In the way the PCs are the stars of the story, the NPCs are the supporting cast, and they should be used effectively.

The campaign world should be liberally populated with NPCs who have a great effect on the lives of the PCs. These NPCs should be of all sorts, both villains and friends, as well as those who are decidedly neutral in their attitude toward the party. They may have small parts to play, or truly great ones, but they should be involved in the ongoing "storymaking," providing substance to the PCs' lives outside of the battles they have won and how many magical items they own. NPCs help the stars of the show interact with the world, and make the story more real.

Over the course of the PCs' adventuring careers, it should become obvious that they like some of the NPCs they run into more than others, and often they love the ones that you never would've thought they'd like at all. Pay attention to the NPCs the players like, and keep them around. There are endless reasons why any number of NPCs can still appear in the lives of the PCs, even when that NPCs' original purpose has been served.

I once ran an adventure that began when the party ran into a dwarven hero named Ulrik who was stalking a troll. Ulrik was not particularly friendly, and he had little use for humans as a race or as adventuring companions, and he made no secret of his feelings; he was about as likeable as a thorn bush. The way I had it planned, the party would help Ulrik succeed in his goal, everyone would divide the gold, and Ulrik would leave, never to

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be seen again. The party had other plans. They wanted to continue adventuring with Ulrik, learn more about him, and eventually become friends with him; they respected him because he was a person who spoke his mind and was true to his word (as well as having a very distinct, hard-nosed attitude). I hadn't planned any of this, but I did play along with the party's wishes, and Ulrik became a strong member of their supporting cast.

Looking again at the example of the castle adventure, the DM tries to think of a reason why the PCs would want to attack it, besides the obligatory treasure and experience points. The party had been harassed numerous times before by a deadly Bounty Hunter who was after them, but he had always managed to escape before, and the party could never track him to his hideout.

What if the Bounty Hunter was living in this castle? That would be an excellent reason for the party to go there in the first place, and it would explain why the place was such a stronghold, and who paid for those high-level mercenary guards that patrolled the walls, not to mention the extreme deadliness of some of those dungeon-traps: a Bounty Hunter's enemies would be dangerous indeed! All of a sudden, things start happening to the generic castle adventure, ideas begin popping into the DM's head, and the scenario begins to

take on a life of its own.

Storytelling "hooks" build off each other, fueling the creation of more story lines as they go. Think of Tolkien's work in the *Lord of the Rings*, and the levels of complexity he put in his novels, the layering of the stories; all of which served only to give the basic story a real texture, making it that much more alive. By putting in different levels of thought into the ongoing story, a good referee can steer his players toward a richer gaming experience without ever losing sight of any of the basic thrills of "dungeoneering." Skilled authors are able to provide enjoyment as well as tell the story that they want to tell; Dungeon Mastering can be done the same way.

### Layering

Another way of making a story out of an average adventure is to layer the story elements, stacking plot lines until the tale is completely fleshed out. One of the best ways of doing this is to avoid cliches at all costs. The concept of fantasy role-playing is built, in a very real sense, on a certain number of archetypes and mythic traditions. There are always heroes, dangerous quests, and vile villains, but that doesn't mean that the game should be full of stereotypes. Stereotypes take away from the interest that the players have in the story; they've seen it all before, and the most

interesting thing that can happen in an adventure is finding some really powerful magical items. Whenever the DM is tempted to use a stereotype, whether it's in the form of an NPC type or a situation, he should think twice. The place where most DMs fall victim to this sort of failing is in the adventure set-up; in our castle adventure, the DM doesn't bother to give any reason for attacking the castle: it's just a convenient starting point.

This doesn't have to be; the party's experiences can blend more evenly, and the beginnings of their adventures don't have to be so simplistic. Consider again our castle example. Why would a well-established Bounty Hunter, who would have legions of enemies just waiting for a shot at him, wait around in a castle that could be stormed by a large enough force? Why would anyone know the location of his castle at all? It seems that the castle's purpose would be more effective if no one knew that he lived there, and if he had many other hideouts as well. Of course! That's why no one has ever been able to catch him napping; he's always moving around!

So how can the DM bring this new idea "layer" into play? It won't work if an NPC clues them in to the fact that the Bounty Hunter can be found there, because that takes away the impact. What if the party goes to assault the castle because they're

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looking for a powerful magical item that they think is hidden there, without knowing that the Bounty Hunter is involved at all? Imagine the scene as the party faces a much more involved and deadly dungeon than they had expected, facing well-equipped and powerful foes: this simple castle that they had thought would be such a pushover turns out to be a very difficult challenge. Picture their surprise when the party finally discovers that their old enemy is the owner of the castle, and that they managed to stumble onto one of his hiding places by sheer chance! The Bounty Hunter, of course, will assume that the PCs are after him, and will take appropriate steps.

The players like the adventure because it is more enjoyable when it is part of a bigger story, a continuing framework that lives and breathes on its own. When handled correctly, the story can become reward enough, overshadowing the effect of treasure and magical rewards; tell a good story and the PCs not only will have fun, but they'll also participate more actively in the game.

## Continuity

Just as the well-developed campaign should make use of recurring NPCs, the adventures should have a logical sense of continuity as well. Several themes should be woven into the campaign over time. It's not necessary that the DM think them all out before the players roll up characters, but it helps if the DM takes an active role in providing cohesiveness. Continuity, the sense that the "pieces" of story that develop from adventures are integrated as part of a larger whole, should be one of the things the DM maintains.

It is the DM's prerogative to rewrite history as necessary. Whenever it serves to make the story more interesting, have the PCs learn what past events were not as cut-and-dried as they had seemed. Old clashes with various groups that seemed to be random at the time turn out to have been orchestrated by one of the party's current favorite enemies. As far as the players know, you were planning this all along. To them, the continuity of the campaign is pretty much a given thing; they want to have a good story, and will suspend disbelief to make it happen.

One of the easiest traps to fall into is having too many of one thing: too many enemies, too many different plot conflicts, too many of the same type of adventure, or whatever. Over the course of a long-running campaign, it's easy to develop more enemies than the party can keep track of, blunting their impact as they become mere numbers in a crowd of goons.

If the party suffers from having too many enemies, kill some of them off and reorganize the rest. As evil tends to turn on itself, have some of the party's enemies from the past who aren't very useful any more show up as cannon fodder for the

more popular bad guys. The party comes around a corner of the trail to find the body of their old foe Trickster, stripped of his powerful items and badly burned. The burns look a lot like those caused by the artifact that their arch-nemesis Krystovar uses, and the party is forced to realize that, as bad as they thought Krystovar was, he's just gotten quite a bit worse. An occasional "house-cleaning" of NPCs like this works to consolidate story elements, tie up loose ends, and emphasize shifts in the thrust in the story. It also prevents players from asking about NPCs who used to seem very important but who simply got forgotten in the press of new adventures; it brings enough closure to the story so that the party can worry about newer challenges.

Guide the episodes that make up the campaign in some cohesive direction, whether it be in a recurring theme or tone, or even just a particular way that it seems the PCs' lives should work out. Bring back someone the PCs met way back when they were 1st level; the NPC can serve to remind the players of where they used to be and where they are now. Try to show the world changing, even as it stays the same in some essential ways. When done properly, this makes the lives of the PCs appear to be almost seamless, and suspends the characters in a place beyond the gaming table and the dice. When the PCs move into the imagination in this way, they take on a "reality" all their own.

## Doubt and misinformation

The DM's job is to provide a clear, well-organized scenario for the players to follow, in which the party acts out their roles, and works to solve the challenges put before them. This is how it's supposed to work, right? Not necessarily. In a lot of cases, the DM need not make the story line so obvious, and in turn, so predictable. What if you start off the adventure without knowing what you're supposed to do? What if it looks as if you can choose from a couple of different adventures, or go in two or more completely different routes? What kind of a game would that be like?

It would be a darn good one. A characteristic of good novels is that they avoid predictability, and a good DM can run his campaign the same way. The players don't need to know from the outset that they're going to retrieve an evil magical item; they could have been hired by an unscrupulous wizard to just "map some ruins." Or the party might be wandering around town buying clothes when a chance encounter sets off a chain of events that lead them ever deeper into mystery and intrigue among the city nobility. Not all stories have to be linear, with a clear-cut beginning, middle, and end. Some are ongoing, and take a great deal of time to fully develop.

The clever DM can provide several "false starts" to the real adventure, and even after the prepared situation has been

finished, the players may still wonder whether they were "meant" to do something else. They may ask if they ruined your plans by taking off on an adventure that you hadn't counted on! By using misinformation, the DM fools the players into thinking that the actions they chose were totally of their own creation, and this gives them the feeling that their characters have free will; they make the story with their choices, and they are free to take the story where they wish. This is absolutely vital! The AD&D game is not some static, pre-planned exercise in doing what is expected! Its strength comes from the fact that it is a fluid game, where things can change drastically at the blink of an eye, and should keep on doing so throughout the playing out of the story!

The players don't need to know everything that happens in the campaign world, and an effective way of simulating their PCs' lack of knowledge is to give the players incorrect information. Commonly held beliefs can be completely wrong, and what anyone knows as the absolute truth need not even have a passing resemblance to the facts.

The party invades the stronghold of an evil wizard, bypasses his defenses and guardian monsters alike; finally, they have the wizard where they want him, in his throne room. They confront him with all the bad things they have ever heard about him, the misdeeds that he is infamous for. He calmly answers each of the party's questions, explaining the real reasons behind his supposedly "horrible" acts. The party is stunned: they expected a horrible monster, and they are confronted with someone who, although powerful, is no more evil than they are! Or is he just telling them a well-prepared story? It's up to the players to decide, but in any case, they are faced with a much more interesting situation than one where the wizard cackles and says, "Fools! You'll never escape my clutches now!" and rubs his hands together menacingly. Use whatever works best, but most of the time the party is not served by having clear, 100% accurate information. Such knowledge takes away the mystery that gives the game spice.

## Conclusion

Think of all the component parts comprising the adventure, not just the monsters, maps, and treasures. Think about why it all happens. Think about how the players and the characters will interact with the situations, and what spins you can put on the story to make it more interesting. Try out small bits of "useless" background that you can throw in to make the session unique. As long as you consider that the campaign world exists, with or without the PCs, and you continue to make it spin, even when they aren't watching, the story will move on, and more importantly, the story and campaign will continue to live.

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# A *Masque of the Red Death* rules expansion



by William W. Connors

[Editor's Note: *Masque of the Red Death and Other Tales* is a new variant of the AD&D® game's RAVENLOFT® rules that allows player characters to explore a macabre world of the 1890s. Set on Gothic Earth, it is a world much like our Victorian era . . . until the sun sets. From the brave cavalryman with his trusty revolver to the mysterious spiritualist and her store of secret knowledge, no one is safe from the horrors of the night. *Masque of the Red Death* contains character kits, a revised system for spell-casting, complete rules for firearms and explosives, and three complete adventures.]

The mind always has been an object of wonder and awe. Since the dawn of time, people have speculated on its powers and limitations. They have pondered the nature of conscious thought and wondered at the origins of the human spirit. The link between body and mind has been investigated repeatedly by scientists, philosophers, and theologians. In the end, their answers are always vague and incomplete. Each inquiry only brings new questions

and demands for further research.

It may well be, as many have speculated, that the actual power of the mind is limitless. Each examination of the brain and its ability to reason or think enhances these powers. If this is the case, no one will ever quantify all the powers of the mind.

Still, there are those who have achieved some manner of insight into the workings of the brain. They include people like Sigmund Freud, whose work in the field of psychoanalysis is earning him both respect and ridicule, and the oft-dismissed Friedrich Anton Mesmer, founder of the so-called science of mesmerism. It is even rumored that there is a qabal, known as the Eye, which has achieved breakthroughs in the study of the mind that the outside world would never believe.

The heroes and adventurers of Gothic Earth are not without unusual mental fortitude. Clearly, anyone who is willing to confront the horrors of the Red Death on a regular basis must be of hardier stock than the common folk who bolt their doors and draw their shutters as the sun sinks from the sky. In rare cases, they have even manifested mental powers that border on the supernatural.

## Psychic proficiencies

The inclusion of psychic proficiencies in a *Masque of the Red Death* campaign is strictly optional. If a Dungeon Master doesn't want to use them, so be it. Some DMs may wish to include them, but restrict their availability to characters of certain classes or kits. Others might make them available only to the villains of their campaign or to exceptional NPCs, adding another element of mystery to the world that surrounds the PCs.

Psychic proficiencies are not nearly as potent as some players would like. A character with the Psychokinesis ability, for example, isn't going to be able rip the door off of a safe with his mind or stop a bullet in its flight toward him. Psychic talents are not comic-book superpowers, they are minor abilities that the heroes (and villains) of the campaign can acquire. If used skillfully, they can be of great benefit to the party.

The leading expert on Mentalism in the *Masque of the Red Death* campaign is Professor Anna Mesmer, the granddaughter of Friedrich Mesmer. Her researches have led her to recognize no fewer than four fields of mental ability: Channelling, Cognition, Kinetics, and Mentalism. She speculates on the possibility of another field that she calls Transference (others have dubbed it teleportation or psychoporation), but admits that she has never been able to satisfactorily establish the existence of such powers.

### Channelling

Mesmer claims to have documented no

fewer than a dozen cases in which psychics were able to harness the power of their mind to do things no normal human could. Perhaps the most fascinating account details a young woman who, through meditation, was able to heal overnight from a bullet wound that should have confined her to bed for weeks.

### Cognition

The second type of psychic power is defined by Mesmer as "the ability to sense things about one's environment in a manner that can be attributed only the power of the mind." Classic examples of cognitive powers include the ability to mentally "see" what is inside a locked room or the long-practiced art of dowsing.

### Kinetics

The third of Mesmer's four talents is Kinetics, the ability to physically manipulate objects with the mind. The best known example of this power is Psychokinesis, by which a person might slide the bolt closed on the other side of a door or cause a revolver to leap off of a table and into his hand.

### Mentalism

Also known as telepathy, it is this field that the public is most familiar with. Through the powers of this field, a character makes her mind receptive to the thoughts of another person or sends her own thoughts directly into another's mind.

### Transference

If this power really exists, it is the most elusive of psychic disciplines. While there certainly are reports of people who have found themselves mysteriously transported across great distances, the veracity of these statements always has been in question. For her part, Mesmer asserts that there are too many such cases for fraud to be possible, but too few for any accurate scientific conclusion to be reached.

### Acquiring psychic proficiencies

Psychic proficiencies are simply another type of nonweapon proficiency. As such, they are purchased in the same way.

Psychic proficiencies are assumed be their own category, just like the Wilderness or Arcane groups. Because of that, any of the existing character classes or kits must allocate an extra slot when purchasing psychic skills.

### Improving psychic proficiencies

The chances of success with normal nonweapon proficiencies can be improved by allocating additional slots to the skill. The same is true of Psychic proficiencies. Thus, a character might opt to expend four slots (five if his kit or class does not allow him ready access to the Psychic group) in order to acquire the photokine-

sis ability and an extra slot in order to gain a +1 bonus to his checks with that power.

## Using psychic proficiencies

As with the proficiencies listed in the *Masque of the Red Death* rule book, the success or failure of any attempt to use a psychic proficiency depends upon the roll of a 20-sided die. Because of the unique nature of these talents, however, there are a number of other factors that must be considered.

### Proficiency checks

When a player wishes his character to employ a Psychic proficiency, he must make a die roll just as he would for any other proficiency. The result of this die roll is compared to the relevant ability score to determine if the attempt was successful or not.

DMs and players should note that the relevant Ability Scores are halved (and rounded up) for the purposes of Psychic proficiency checks. This is because of the uncertainty associated with the use of such powers. Certainly the mind is a wonderful thing and it has great potential, but in the 1890s that potential is only beginning to be understood. It will be a long time before mankind truly masters the skills of the psychic.

### Concentration

In order to sustain any psychic power, a character must maintain his concentration. This is not unlike the requirement that an Adept or Mystic has when spell-casting. Indeed, the same sorts of things

that will break a spell-caster's concentration will disrupt the efforts of a psychic. These include the taking of damage or a sudden distraction. In the end, it's the Dungeon Master who must decide whether a psychic's concentration has been broken. If the matter is in doubt, an Ability Check on Wisdom can be used to resolve the issue.

### Fatigue

Unleashing the powers of one's mind is not something done without a great deal of effort.

*Mental fatigue:* Repeated attempts to employ psychic powers can result in their temporary loss. Only by resting can a character restore his spent energies. To reflect this, characters with psychic abilities are limited in the number of times each day that they can attempt to use their powers.

The first Psychic proficiency check that a character makes each day is conducted in the normal manner. Each additional check, whether the roll succeeds or fails, imposes a -1 penalty to the chance of success. Thus, the second attempt to use one's power each day suffers a -1 penalty. Sooner or later, the penalties will become so great that the character cannot succeed in his proficiency check. At this time, the character is mentally exhausted and will be unable to use his powers again until he sleeps for a number of hours equal to his accumulated die-roll penalty.

In addition, characters who have begun to suffer from mental fatigue but who are not yet exhausted can reduce the penalties

they have accumulated by sleeping. Each hour of rest will reduce the penalty by 1 point. Thus, if a character who has earned himself a -5 penalty manages to get 3 hours of sleep on a train ride, his penalty would be reduced to -2.

*Physical exertion:* The effort of employing psychic powers is taxing on both mind and body. The same penalty that is applied to a character's Psychic proficiency checks is imposed upon all attack and damage rolls, saving throws, and proficiency checks.

*Secondary checks:* Some powers permit a character to make a second (or even a third) proficiency check in order to increase the effectiveness of their use. For example, a character employing the Post-cognition talent can make a second check to obtain a clearer impression of what has happened in an area. In such cases, these count as additional checks for the purposes of mental and physical fatigue, just as if they were separate uses of the talent.

Almost without exception, anything that calls for a proficiency check counts toward the character's fatigue.

## Psychic talents vs. *The Complete Psionics Handbook*

Even a quick look at the proficiencies described on the following pages will reveal that the psychics of Gothic Earth are not in the same league as the psionists of the AD&D game campaign. This is no accident.

A gothic setting like the one established for the *Masque of the Red Death* game requires certain elements and, by its very nature, rules out others. The abilities of the mind as detailed in *The Complete Psionics Handbook* are fine for the heroes in an AD&D game, but they are too powerful for *Masque* characters.

Does this mean that *The Complete Psionics Handbook* can't be used within a *Masque* campaign? Not at all. There's no reason why a DM can't introduce adversaries with psychic powers far beyond those that they player characters have.

## Proficiency descriptions

Like all proficiency descriptions, the definitions that follow are guidelines only. Dungeon Masters are encouraged to consider the variations that players are bound to come up with before deciding if they want to permit the use of psychic talents in their game.

### Kinetic talents

The field of kinetics deals with the physical manipulation of matter through the force of will. The ability score upon which all kineticists depend is Intelligence. This represents the raw power of the mind and it is that which must be employed when using a kinetic talent.

In order to use any of the kinetic talents, a character must be able to see the object he wishes to affect (although there may be a barrier between them, such as a win-

<b>Kinetic proficiencies</b>	<b># of slots</b>	<b>Relevant ability</b>	<b>Check mod.</b>
Cryokinesis	4	Int/2	+1
Electrokinesis	4	Int/2	-1
Photokinesis	4	Int/2	0
Psychokinesis	4	Int/2	0
Thermokinesis	4	Int/2	+1

<b>Cognitive proficiencies</b>	<b># of slots</b>	<b>Relevant ability</b>	<b>Check mod.</b>
Analytical sense	4	Wis/2	-1
Dowsing	4	Wis/2	0
Postcognition	4	Wis/2	+1
Precognition	4	Wis/2	-1
Prescience	4	Wis/2	+1

<b>Channeling proficiencies</b>	<b># of slots</b>	<b>Relevant ability</b>	<b>Check mod.</b>
Awareness	4	Con/2	0
Equilibrium	4	Con/2	+1
Fervor	4	Con/2	+1
Fortitude	4	Con/2	+1
Rejuvenation	4	Con/2	+0

<b>Mentalism proficiencies</b>	<b># of slots</b>	<b>Relevant ability</b>	<b>Check mod.</b>
Domination	4	Cha/2	-2
Nightmare	4	Cha/2	-2
Presence	4	Cha/2	+1
Projection	4	Cha/2	0
Sensitivity	4	Cha/2	0

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dow). In addition, the object must not be farther away than the experience-level number of the character in feet.

In addition to distance, the weight of an object is important too. A kineticist cannot affect an object that weighs more than one pound per experience level. Thus, a 3rd-level character can affect an object weighing up to three pounds.

Living matter is naturally resistant to kinetic powers. Although the reasons for this are unknown, Mesmer suspects that it has something to do with the fundamental aura of mental power that surrounds all forms of life. This seems to be born out by the fact that once-living matter can be affected by kinetic powers. Clearly, there is something about the presence of a life force or spirit that blocks certain mental abilities.

Additional restrictions may be given in the description of a specific talent.

**Cryokinesis:** Characters with this ability are mentally able to slow the vibrating of the molecules that make up an object, reducing its temperature. In order for the character to begin cooling an object, he must make a successful proficiency check. Once that is done, he can continue to reduce the temperature of an object each round until the psychic either decides or is forced to cease his efforts.

Each round of effort cools an object by 20° fahrenheit. Thus, a glass of water that is at room temperature (70°) can be made to freeze in two minutes as its temperature falls to 50° and then to 30°. An object that is reduced to freezing or below may become brittle and easy to break, depending upon its composition.

Objects that are reduced to below 0° Fahrenheit and then used as weapons will inflict an extra point of damage for every 20° below zero. Thus, a metal pipe reduced to -40° will do an extra two points of damage if used as a bludgeon. The psychic is not immune to this effect and would have to wear insulated gloves or suffer two points of damage himself for wielding the weapon.

Once the kineticist ceases his efforts, the object will return to its normal temperature at a rate of 10° per round. In unusual conditions, this rate may be different.

**Electrokinesis:** When a kineticist employs this power, she causes an object to shed electrons, creating an electrical current. In a manner of speaking, she can turn anything into a small electrical generator. After making a successful proficiency check, the character can cause an electrical current to begin flowing through the affected object.

Naturally conductive objects are easier to affect than ones that make good insulators. For game purposes, there are assumed to be five classes of electrical conductivity. Other factors can be taken into consideration by the DM, such as temperature and density, and might alter the listed category of a given substance.

Category	Examples	Mod.
Awful	Rubber, glass	- 4
Poor	Wood, rock	- 2
Average	Lake water	0
Good	Steel, bronze	+2
Excellent	Gold, copper	+4

Each category has a modifier associated with it. This is applied to the initial check made by the kineticist and to both the weight and range restrictions of all kinetic powers.

For example, a 5th-level kineticist would normally be able to induce a current flow in a five-pound object at a distance of 5'. If the object were made of wood or rock, these are reduced to three pounds and a range of 3'. If the target object were made of steel or bronze, the kineticist could affect an object of up to seven pounds at a distance of up to 7'.

Each round that the kineticist concentrates on maintaining the current, the flow increases its strength. Anyone coming into contact with an object that is being charged will suffer one point of damage per round that the power has been employed. Thus, an object would do three points of damage on the third round, four on the fourth, five on the fifth, and so on. The conductivity modifier from the above chart applies to this damage as well.

When a character stops concentrating on maintaining the current flow, it stops at once. It is only the power of the kineticist's will that maintains the flow of electrons.

As a weapon, electrokinesis is hardly effective. After all, even a fairly experienced kineticist won't be able to do as much damage to a character as a gunshot. In addition, a bullet is a great deal easier and faster to employ. The use of this power however, is in the imagination of the kineticist. After all, a sudden electrical shock, even one that does only one point of damage, is likely to startle an opponent, throwing him off guard or causing him to drop the item that shocked him.

**Photokinesis:** This power enables a character to excite the atoms in an object, causing them to give off light. A minimal release of heat occurs at the same time, but this is so slight as to be unnoticeable to the touch.

The intensity of the light released varies based upon the level of the psychic and the mass of the object. For every level of experience that a photokineticist has attained, he can create a glow that illuminates an area one yard (3' in diameter).

In addition, larger objects can be used to create brighter light sources. The size of the area that a character can illuminate is multiplied by the mass of the glowing object (in pounds). Thus, a two-pound light source doubles the illumination possible.

For example, a 12th-level character can manifest a light bright enough to illuminate a circle 36' across. If the object that he is causing to glow weighs six pounds, the light released will be bright enough to

fill an area 72' in diameter.

It takes roughly one minute from the time that a character begins using this power for an object to reach its maximum brightness. During that time, the glow builds evenly. As soon as the character breaks off his concentration, the glow fades away over the same period of time. The light produced by this power always is a pure white.

For the most part, photokinesis cannot be used to cause blindness or directly inflict damage. Of course, the DM might rule differently in an unusual situation. For example, a cave-dwelling creature unused to light brighter than that of bioluminescent moss might be unable to stand the radiance produced by a photokinetic.

**Psychokinesis:** This was one of the most common abilities found by Professor Mesmer during her studies. While she could find no reason for the relative frequency of this psychic phenomenon, her evidence is well researched and seems incontrovertible.

Those with psychokinetic talents are able to cause an object to move with the power of their mind alone. The typical speed at which the target of the kineticist's will travels is 1' per minute for each level of experience attained by the character. This assumes that the target will be sliding across a horizontal surface.

If the object is moving down an incline, sliding across an unusually slick surface, or has a shape conducive to movement (e.g., a sphere or wheel), this speed is doubled. If the object is moving across a rough surface, up an incline, or is of an irregular shape, the base rate is halved.

A psychokineticist also can attempt to lift an object off of the ground with this power. When this is done, the basic movement rate is halved, just as if it were rolling up a hill. If an object is levitated on one round, it can be moved horizontally on the next at half the normal rate of speed. In this case, it is assumed that a portion of the psychic's power is being used to support the object, leaving less to impart the motion.

As soon as the psychokinetic stops directing his will at an object, all induced movement ceases. If the object was being made to hover, it promptly falls to the ground. An object on a slope or predisposed toward movement (like a wheel) may continue moving on its own.

Because of the limited speed at which objects can be moved with this power, it is difficult to use psychokinesis in a direct attack. Of course, exceptions might be found. An object might be nudged off of a shelf, causing it to fall on someone below, for example.

**Thermokinesis:** This power is similar in many ways to cryokinesis. When a psychic who is skilled in thermokinesis focuses his will on an object, he speeds up the vibrations of the atoms that make it up. The result of this is an increase in the

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temperature of the target.

After making a proficiency check to attain control of the target object, the character is able to increase its temperature by 20° Fahrenheit each round. Thus, an object at room temperature (70° F) can be raised nearly to body temperature in one minute. An object that is raised to 150° or more will do additional damage if used as a weapon. For every 50° or fraction thereof beyond that limit, the object will gain a +1 bonus to the damage it inflicts.

Flammable objects may burst into flame if heated to a high enough temperature. Because of the great diversity of situations that a character is likely to encounter in the course of a campaign, the Dungeon Master will have to judge the effects of this power in each case.

When the character ceases to employ his power, the object will begin to cool until it reaches room temperature. Under normal circumstances, the object will shed 10° of heat per round until it has returned to its normal temperature.

#### Cognitive talents

When most people who are untrained in the science of psychic phenomena are asked to give examples of a paranormal mental ability, they often describe the powers that Professor Mesmer groups under the category of Cognition. It is this group of abilities that enables a psychic to sense happenings that he is not himself privy to. It matters little whether the events being examined happened in the past, will happen in the future, or are happening at that moment in a distant location.

The range at which a cognitive can use his powers varies with the ability. For those that relay information about current events, like dowsing or analytical sense, the range is 10' per experience level attained by the character. For powers like Postcognition or Precognition, the character must be in the exact location that he wishes to acquire information about. In this case, the range of the power reflects the amount of time that the power can overcome. In this case, the range is equal to character's experience level in hours.

In all cases, a cognitive need only make a single proficiency check to begin the use of his power. Once that is done, he can maintain it for as long as his concentration holds. In some cases, additional checks may allow the character to sharpen his perception and receive more exact information.

**Analytical sense:** Someone who is blessed with this ability can sense the elemental composition of an object. Unlike most of the other abilities discussed in this article, a character using this power must touch the object he wishes to analyze.

Upon making contact with the target substance, the psychic must make a proficiency check. If the check is successful,

the character instantly learns the basic nature of the object. For example, a character touching a bullet taken from the body of a wounded man would know that the projectile was made of lead.

A second check (made on the next round) allows the character to deduce even more about the object being examined. This might include the presence of trace elements or an important structural flaw. In the case of the bullet, for instance, the character might sense that it had traces of blood, flesh, and gunpowder on it.

If the character has two (or more) samples of a specific material, he can attempt to discover similarities between them. The character might be able to tell if the bullet mentioned above was fired by the same gun as another one that was pulled from a body several days earlier. Such a comparison requires that both objects be touched and that the character make a proficiency check for each one.

Other applications of this power might be suggested by the players and, with the DM's approval, added to those mentioned above. In order to get full use out of this ability, a character ought to be required to take the Chemistry proficiency.

**Dowsing:** Those with this power are best known for their remarkable ability to find water in places that appear to be dry. In actuality, the scope of this talent is far greater than that. Dowsers are able to use their mental powers to detect anything odd or unusual in a given place.

In addition, if a dowser is looking for a specific object, she can attempt to sense its location. In order to do this, the character must be familiar with the target of her search. This doesn't mean that she has to have held it or examined the object itself, a simple knowledge of the lore surrounding the item will suffice.

For example, a group of characters might be searching through an ancient crypt for a magical crystal. The dowser, who has studied the object, bends her will to the task and, after making a proficiency check, senses that it is beneath one of the flagstones that make up the floor.

When the character first attempts to use this power, she must make a proficiency check. If the check fails, she may make another on the next round. Additional checks can be made each round, subject to the normal fatigue rules, until the dowser wishes to break off the mental search or exhaustion overtakes her.

**Postcognition:** This power is similar to the Psychometry proficiency described in the *Masque of the Red Death* set. However, it is both more powerful and a good deal more reliable.

In order to use this power, a character opens his mind to the karmic resonances of the cognitive's location and gradually begins to sense the things that have transpired there. A single proficiency check is sufficient to allow him to see what has

happened for a number of hours equal to his level. The information received from this trance is vague, however. For example, the character might learn that great violence has filled the room in which he now stands.

By making a second proficiency check, the character can focus his impression of the past and examine a specific incident more clearly. For example, he might note that three men were there: Abraham Van Helsing, Jonathan Harker, and Professor Challenger. This assumes, of course, that these individuals were known to the psychic. If not, he would have a clear impression of their faces and could easily pick them out of a crowd or, if he also had some artistic ability, sketch them for others to identify.

**Precognition:** With this ability, a character can send his mental perceptions forward in time to determine what is going to happen at a given location within the next several hours. The physical area to be investigated must be the place in which the psychic employs his power.

As with Postcognition, a single proficiency check allows the character to receive impressions about events as far in the future as his level number in hours. A second check allows him to sharpen his understanding of these events and see very clear visions of what will be.

Unlike Postcognition, which presents the mentalist with information about an already fixed past, the precognitive is seeking to learn about that which has not yet transpired. The images that such a character sees reflect what will happen if the psychic takes no action to change them. Thus; it is possible for a precognitive hero to warn someone that he will be attacked if he enters a certain place and, by keeping the victim out of that area, prevent the vision from coming to pass.

However, the flow of time is difficult to turn. The events that a psychic sees will generally be difficult to avert. A victim who is warned to stay out of a room might enter it "just for a second" when she remembers that she left an unread letter there.

**Prescience:** Those who have the gift of Prescience are able to see events that are transpiring nearby, even if their vision is blocked by a wall, blindfold, or other obstacle. This power, which is often called second sight or clairvoyance is among those most familiar to the general public.

In order to employ this power, a character need only indicate the area he is attempting to receive perceptions from and make a successful proficiency check. When this is done, the character will get a general impression of the area he is mentally examining.

For example, a character might sense that the room beyond a locked door contains two men or he might learn that a closed box contains a pistol.

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A second check allows the character to gather more exact information. In the cases listed above, he might learn that the room contains two men armed with revolvers and waiting to fire on intruders.

Tradition holds that barriers made of certain elements, lead for instance, will prevent a psychic from seeing what is beyond them. Professor Mesmer's experiments found no basis in fact for these beliefs. It might be possible, she theorized, for a sufficient electrical charge or even a supernatural influence to disrupt the powers of a psychic, but inert matter seemed unable to form a shield on its own.

### Channelling talents

The group of talents that Professor Mesmer refers to as Channelling often are associated with oriental mysticism. In short, they all enable a person to force his body beyond its normal limits or abilities. Those who are able to employ the art of Channelling have been known to do things that even the most gifted athletes would find difficult, if not impossible.

When a psychic wishes to employ a Channelling proficiency, he must focus all his will on the act. Many have described seeing a great sense of calm come across the face of a mentalist harnessing the powers of mind over body while others have reported that the subject's features became quite feral and primitive. It may

well be that there is more than one route by which the desired end result is achieved.

The physical advantages gained through the use of Channelling are fleeting. As a rule, they can be maintained for a number of minutes equal to the level of the psychic. In all cases, a single proficiency check is required to activate the power, after which it is retained for its full duration without additional rolls.

Unlike the other powers researched by Professor Mesmer, these do not appear to require continued concentration to maintain. A sudden physical shock, usually in the form of an injury (i.e., the loss of hit points), requires the character to make an Ability Check on his Constitution score to avoid having the power fail. Apart from that, it will remain in effect until its duration has lapsed or the mentalist wills it to cease.

The elimination of the requirement for concentration does not mean that the normal mental and physical fatigue rules are waived.

**Awareness:** When this power is activated, the character's senses become greatly enhanced. Although this is most apparent in his vision, smell, and hearing, all five of the character's physical senses are sharpened.

The enhanced eyesight of the character

allows him to see perfectly well in even the faintest light. It does not, however, bestow upon him the power of infravision or give him any unnatural ability to sense illusions or phantasms.

The character's sharpened hearing gives him the same powers as the Detect Noise proficiency. Unlike that skill, however, the character's enhanced senses function perfectly well even when the mentalist is moving or if the area around him is not perfectly quiet.

The character's sense of smell enables him to detect even the faintest odors with ease. A familiar scent can be identified and a new one will be clearly remembered so that it might later be recalled. For the duration of this power, the character can follow a scent as well as any bloodhound. In essence, this use of the power duplicates the Tracking proficiency.

The character's sense of taste enables him to detect poisons in food or water, although he must sample the item to be tested and this can be deadly with an especially potent toxin. An Ability Check on Intelligence is required whenever the character wishes to use his enhanced taste in this way.

Lastly, the character's sense of touch is greatly increased. This can be of great value in delicate operations, such as lock picking or filching a wallet. In such cases, it is assumed to duplicate the Open Locks and Pick Pockets skills.

In the event that a psychic already has one of the skills that Awareness duplicates, he is allowed to make two rolls for any feat he attempts. If either of the rolls succeeds, the character has done what he set out to do. Thus, a safe cracker with the Awareness talent and the Open Locks skill decides to break into a strongbox. He sinks into his psychic trance (making a successful Awareness check) and then goes to work. He rolls on his normal Open Locks skill first, but rolls high and fails to defeat the strongbox. Falling back on his increased senses, he makes a second roll on the Open Locks skill, rolls low, and the tumblers fall into place.

**Equilibrium:** A character with Equilibrium is able to greatly improve his sense of balance for the duration of the psychic trance. In effect, this gives him a Dexterity score of 18. If the character already has a score of 18 or higher, he gains a 1 point bonus. All of the normal benefits associated with an increased Dexterity score, including any Armor Class bonus or improved chance to hit with ranged weapons, are received.

**Fervor:** When a psychic employs this power, his physical might is greatly enhanced. This has the effect of raising his Strength score to an 18. If the character's class or kit entitles him to receive an Exceptional Strength roll, the player should roll anew each time the power is invoked. Should the psychic already have a

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Strength score of 18 or better when he employs this power, his current Ability Score is increased by 1 point.

All of the normal benefits associated with an increase in Strength are gained for the duration of the Channelling.

**Fortitude:** The activation of this power has the effect of instantly boosting the character's resistance to harm, illness, and poisons. In game terms, this means a sudden jump in his Constitution score to 18. If the psychic already has a Constitution of 18 or better, his current score is increased by 1 point.

All of the normal advantages associated with an 18 (or higher) Constitution are instantly applied.

If his class or kit allows him to receive Exceptional Constitution (that is, a bonus of greater than +2 to Hit Die rolls) he may now adjust his hit-point total to reflect any increase. When the power ceases, the character's hit points returns to normal. Damage taken while the character was under the effects of Fortitude come off of the bonus hit points first and then from his normal hit points.

**Rejuvenation:** This is one of the most valuable Channelling abilities that an adventuring character can have, for it allows a person to greatly increase his healing rate. When a character activates this

power, his body begins to mend wounds at a rate of 1 hit point per round. The duration of the trance thus indicates the number of points that a character can regain through the use of this power.

Rejuvenation does not count as magical healing, for there is nothing supernatural about it. Thus, injuries that are not subject to a cure light wounds spell could be healed through Rejuvenation.

#### **Mentalism talents**

The power of one mind to make contact with another is a truly amazing thing. Indeed, it was the investigation of this type of power that first lured Dr. Mesmer to undertake her examinations of the psychic world.

Mentalism powers are limited in their range. The maximum distance at which such talents will work is equal to the level of the psychic in yards. Thus, a 10th-level psychic can contact a mind up to 10 yards, or 30' away.

As with all psychic abilities, those of the mentalism class require the character to focus all of his attention on the subject. This prevents him from taking any other action for the duration of the psychic trance. The notable exception to these guidelines is Presence.

**Domination:** Perhaps the most insidious of all mental abilities, a character who

has mastered the science of Domination is able to command others to do as he instructs.

After making a successful proficiency check, the psychic may transmit a brief command to his target. The number of words in this cannot exceed the level of the psychic. If the required action takes more than one round to complete, or if the mentalist wishes to keep control of the victim for a longer period of time, a new proficiency check must be made in order to keep control of the victim each round.

The target of this mental attack is allowed a saving throw vs. spells to resist it. The save is attempted when the mentalist first makes contact with the character. This roll is modified by the Magical Defense Bonus (provided by his Wisdom score). In the event that the psychic attempts to keep control for longer than one round, no additional saving throws are permitted. If the saving throw is successful, the character is unaware that anything unusual has happened.

The normal limitations associated with magical control of a person's actions do not apply in the case of Domination. Because the mentalist is actually taking control of the victim's body, he can command it to do whatever he desires. Thus, a victim could be ordered to do things he would never ordinarily consider.

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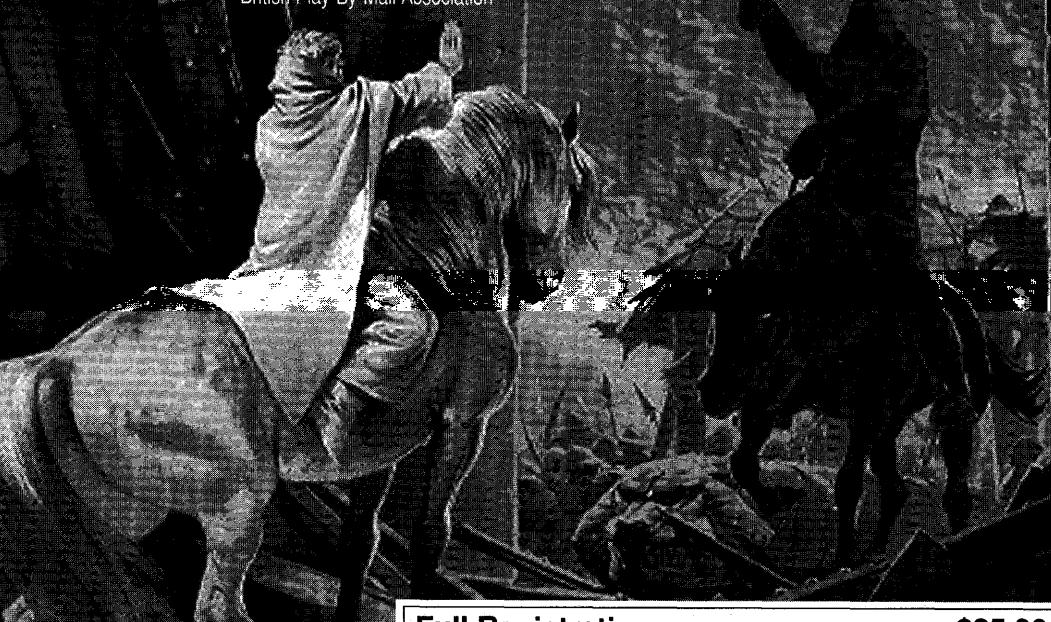
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- Estimated release date is October or November 1994.
- \$15.95 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

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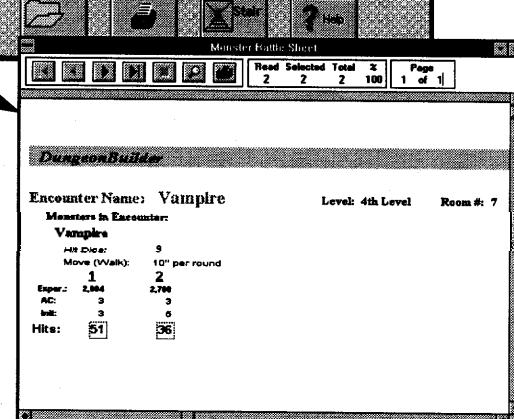
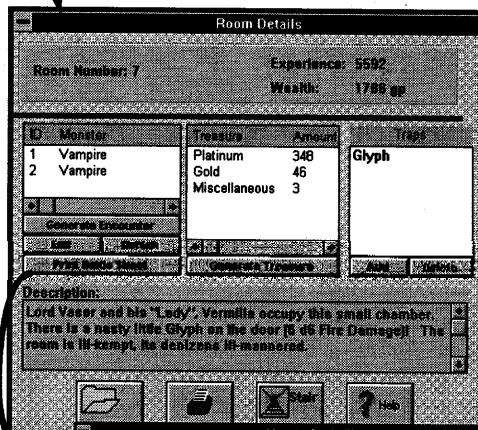
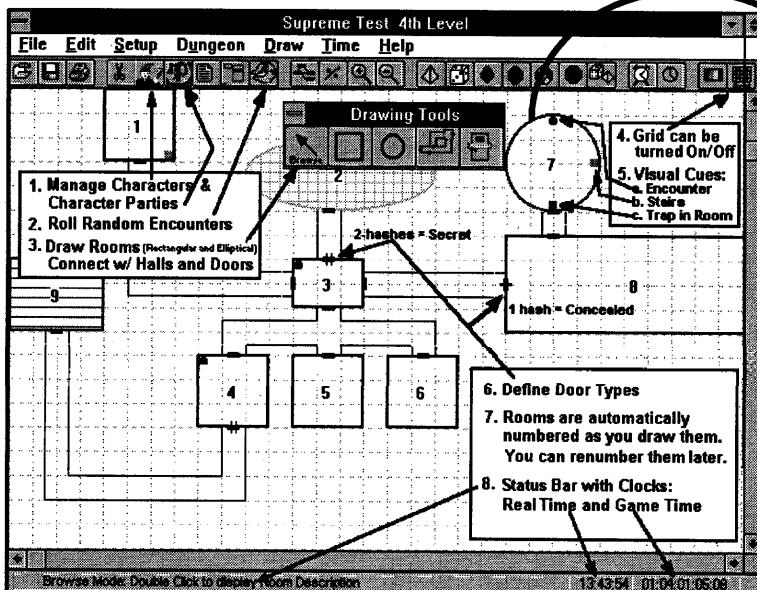
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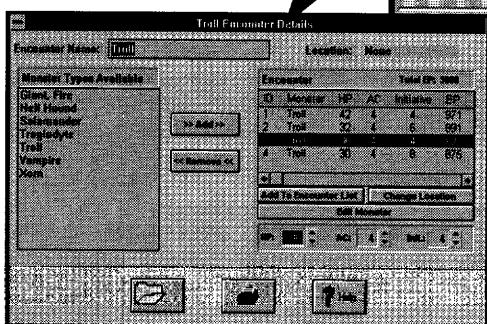
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## The multimedia world

Ever wonder what's on that CD-ROM or just what the heck a CD-ROM is and why you would want one? Curious if some "interactive multimedia" game is as great as you hoped or a thinly disguised honker? Want to know the secrets of multimedia?

Well, ask us. That's our job, to be opinionated and cranky reviewers who spend endless hours in front of the terminal playing the best and the worst so you don't have to. It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it.

First, though, we'd better introduce ourselves and confess a couple of dark secrets. We're the jovial curmudgeons and Internationally Celebrated Game Designers Ken "Preserved" Rolston, Paul "Awkward" Murphy, and David "Zeb" Cook. We are men of strong opinion, mighty verbiage, and sharp tongues. We'll be reviewing different multimedia titles in our columns; one of us actually playing and reviewing a given title, the other two merely exercising their cheap wit.

So who are these guys, anyway?

Dave "Zeb" Cook on Ken Rolston: Ken is quite mad.

Which probably explains his desire for good story lines, dramatics, and a strong sense of place in games. Eminent guru of West End Games' PARANOIA\* and Avalon Hill's RUNEQUEST\* games, Ken is the arch-theorist of the group. Consequently, the other two of us have no idea what he is really talking about, but his enthusiasm is contagious.

Ken Rolston on Paul Murphy: Murph's internationally celebrated for the PARANOIA and Game Workshop's SPACE HULK\* games. Poor Paul has spent his paper game career mostly as an Editor and Developer—that is, he's been cleaning up the messes made by Egomaniacal Designers like Zeb and I while we get to parade around and take credit for his work. Unlike Zeb and I, Murph is a grizzled veteran computer-game designer, so he actually knows what he is talking about. His game sense is concrete and practical, and his prose is lucid; that's how you can distinguish Paul from us other windbags.

Paul Murphy on David "Zeb" Cook: Geez. What the heck needs to be said about Zeb Cook? He's this game designer, see? Having written myriad games, books, and other entertainment-type products for an extremely popular enemy game company which will remain nameless, he's far more famous than I.

Though relatively new to the computer biz, Zeb has a remarkable game sense. That is, he knows instinctively what makes a game good or bad. On the other hand, he's recently shaved his head, which suggests that game sense is the only kind he has.

# EYE OF THE MONITOR

by "Preserved, Awkward, & Zeb"

With that out of the way, why multimedia and just what do we know about it? Why multimedia? Because—and here's one of the dark secrets—that's what all three of us do. After wreaking havoc on the paper and computer-game industries for a few years, we're all off working in the newest of electronic frontiers—multimedia CD-ROM games and edutainment.

What is multimedia? We don't know! But neither does anybody else. That's another really dark secret. Right now, every CEO, TV executive, and game publisher is hot to be in the field of interactive multimedia. It's the big pot at the end of the rainbow. The problem is nobody really knows what's in that pot; all they know is it will make them rich, rich, rich! So naturally, everything is interactive, everything is multimedia! There's interactive multimedia games, interactive multimedia education, interactive TV (they already figure they're multimedia), interactive rides, and interactive multimedia washing machines. Is it really, honestly, and truly interactive or multimedia? "Who cares?" they say. "We just want to make money."

And that's why the world needs guys like us.

### The Seventh Guest

A CD-ROM game by Trilobyte and Virgin Games, Inc.

*Platform:* Macintosh

*Game concept and design:* Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros

*Script written by:* Matthew Costello

*Lead artist:* Robert Stein III

*Trilobyte producer:* David Luehmann

*Executive producer:* Neil Young

*Creative consultant:* David Bishop

*Music composed and produced by:* The Fat Man and Team Fat

*Principal cast:* Robert Hirschboeck, Douglas Knapp, Michael Pocaro, Larry Roher, Jolene Patrick, Debra Ritz Mason, Julia Tucker, Ted Lawson

Reviewed by Paul Murphy

So what is a CD-ROM game, anyway? And how does it differ from a floppy-disc computer game?

Good question. Glad I asked.

(Obvious set-up line. We could have helped him with that.—Zeb)

It's like this: A compact disc is big. Really big. Huge, in fact. A single compact disc holds more than 400 times as much data as a single floppy. And that's good. It allows the creators to stuff horrible amounts of data into a game; and since CDs are relatively cheap, creators can do so without charging more (they often charge more anyway, but that's another story).

Floppies, on the other hand, are expensive. Each additional disc cuts significantly into the profit-margin for a game. Thus, the loathsome profit-driven game-company executives often restrict the number of floppies they put in the game—usually to one less than the designers, artists, and programmers think they need.

Designers of CD-based games don't have this problem. They, in fact, have the opposite problem: what the heck to do with all that extra space? How can they convince the customer that he's getting his money's worth?

The standard answer is to fill the extra space with cool graphics, video images, and stereo-quality sound. Fortunately, these take up gratifyingly large amounts of

space. Thus, in the aforementioned 30-meg game, the producers might tack on a 15-minute opening sequence, complete with animation, full-motion video, and stereo sound. With luck, this will eat up an additional 500 megs of space on the CD for relatively little extra work.

There's nothing inherently wrong with this approach. When used properly, extensive audio and visual effects can greatly enhance the gaming experience. However, they also can be used for evil and immoral purposes. For example, extensive audio and visual effects can be used to disguise the fact that the "game" has no gaming experience. Which, unfortunately, brings us to the product we are reviewing.

### The game

There's this toy maker named Stauf, see? He makes really neat, cool toys, which the kids love. He sells lots of toys. He becomes fabulously rich and builds a big house outside of town. Then the children begin to die....

Six guests are invited to old man Stauf's house. If they solve the mystery of the house, Stauf will grant their wishes. If not, they die.

"Old man Stauf built a house  
And filled it with his toys.  
Six guests all came one night  
Their screams the only noise . . ."

After that build-up, you'd expect *The Seventh Guest* to be a horror adventure or role-playing game, right? You've got this magnificently creepy old house, filled with shadowy images of fear and death. You've got animation and live-action video images of folks getting whacked in unpleasant ways by old man Stauf. You've got a story line revolving around evil rituals and the murder of children. And what do you do? You solve puzzles. Word puzzles. Chess puzzles. Cryptograms. Logic puzzles. Sliding block puzzles.

Ooooh, scary!

There are around 25 puzzles scattered throughout the house. None of them have anything to do with the plot.

### Puzzles

It's like this. You find yourself inside a beautifully-rendered 3-D house. Using a simple point-and-click interface, you wander around this house, going upstairs, downstairs, into the basement, etc. When you click on a door, it opens and you enter that room. Somewhere in each room is hidden a puzzle. When you find the puzzle (indicated by an amusing icon of a skull with rolling eyes and a bulging brain), the screen changes to show the puzzle board.

You work on the puzzle until you solve it (or give up), at which point you return to the movement interface.

Part of the challenge of the puzzles is that you aren't told the rules: you must figure them out for yourself. Old Man Stauf sometimes gives you some cryptic clue, but other than that, you're on your own.

So, for instance, you might wander into a room with a black-and-white check pattern on the floor. You click on the floor, it resolves itself into a chess-board, and old Man Stauf mutters at you something about eight queens, and your cursor turns into a rolling eyeball. Now what?

Having nothing better to do, you click your rolling eyeball on the board somewhere. Gratifyingly, a queen sprouts up in that position.

You click somewhere else, and another queen sprouts up. Now you're getting somewhere. You click somewhere else: another queen sprouts up, but one of the earlier-placed queens disappears. Oh oh. Not so good. Wonder why that happened? You experiment for a while. Sometimes placed queens stay where they are; sometimes they disappear when another is placed.

Eventually, you figure out the object of the puzzle: you must place eight queens on the board with none of them in a position to take any other. This is an old chess problem, and a lot harder than it sounds.

The quality of the puzzles in *The Seventh Guest* varies enormously. Some I've never seen before; some are hoary old chestnuts. Some are exceedingly tricky and fun—I very much enjoyed the Othello/Go variant, the letter substitutions, and the bishops puzzle—some are exceedingly easy; some are just plain bad.

### Rewards

When you solve a puzzle, you are rewarded with a bit of video showing you a continuation of the plot. Ghostly figures appear in the room, do stuff, and occasionally get killed in interesting fashions. This is mildly entertaining: the plot line is sufficiently creepy and the acting is adequate. However, you should be warned that you can't change anything in the plot: you're a spectator and that's all. Given the power of the computer to allow player interactivity, this is a disappointment.

### Trappings

It's here, in the external stuff, that *The Seventh Guest* shines. This program looks as good as any I've seen. The setting is no less than stunning. The house is beautifully rendered in full 3-D.

Movement within the house is relatively smooth—though there are some clunky, jerky moments when the room is extra complicated. The full-motion video is okay. The music and sound are quite good.

There are some nice, creepy frills that add to the mood (for instance, click on the painting at the top of the stairs). The interface is fine: amusing and intuitive.

### Conclusion

There's just not enough game here. Twenty-odd puzzles may sound like a lot, but think about it: a typical issue of Games Magazine contains dozens and dozens of puzzles—at a much lower price. And there are better puzzle collections on computer—

*Castle of Doctor Brain*, for one. In *Castle of Doctor Brain*, the puzzles are at least as entertaining, and far better-integrated into the story.

In the final analysis, *The Seventh Guest* suffers from an incurable case of confusion about what it is trying to be. It's either a collection of puzzles encumbered by an unnecessary horror setting and story—or it's a horror story and setting encumbered by an unnecessary collection of puzzles. There are bigger and better puzzle collections out there, and there are better horror stories. By trying to be both, it fails at each.

Which is a pity, because it sure is beautiful.

(I think Paul's perfectly accurate in his analysis, though too harsh in his judgment. *The Seventh Guest* is a visually charming presentation of computer puzzles in a slick horror-story frame. I was impressed with the narrative setup, and disappointed that the narrative wasn't developed. But it is a very simple and episodic computer-game experience, while most computer games are rather more complex and compulsively absorbing. This game also has automated frustration control (the hints in the Library).

Veteran computer-game fans take for granted the esoteric communication exchange culture that has grown up around the exchange of gaming hints and walk-throughs many games. *The Seventh Guest*'s greatest virtue may be that it lets its audience play a pleasant, pretty computer game without joining the gamer culture.—Ken)

### Gadget

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Windows: 486 33mhz, Windows, mouse,  
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256 color monitor, double-speed CD-ROM  
drive, Soundblaster compatible

*Director:* Haruhiko Shono

Reviewed by Ken Rolston

Okay. You've never heard of this title. You'll never find it in software retail stores or game magazine ads. According to one advertisement, it won the Minister's Prize at the 1993 Multimedia Grand Prix in Japan. (I admit I'm impressed. Winning a prize in Japan is cool. Right? Though I wonder what won that prize in previous years.) Though it's been reviewed in *MacUser* and *Wired*, it's rather obscure here in the U.S.A., primarily because of the tragic understatement of its marketing here in the States.

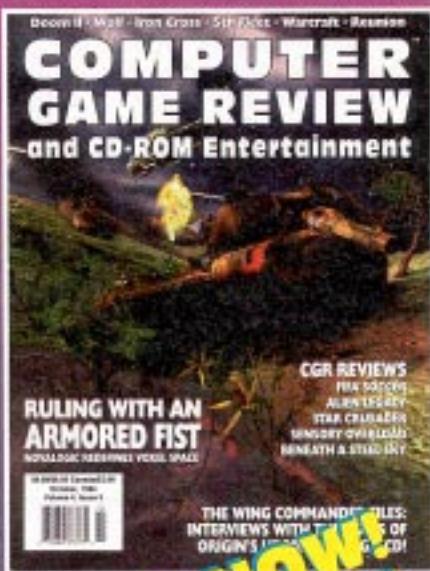
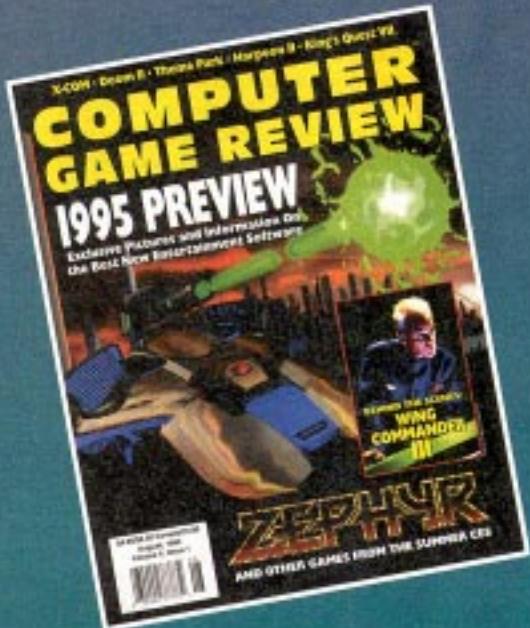
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HTSF

I love *Gadget*. Admittedly, as a Mac user, I am starved for quality CD-ROM game experiences. But *Gadget* blew me away. I virtually worship the guy who turned me on to it. I have enthusiastically forced *Gadget* on numerous friends and colleagues.

But is it a game? No way. Is it an interactive movie? Yes or no, depending on your expectations for the word "interactive." Is it a first-class CD-ROM entertainment? You bet.

#### When is a game not a game?

*Gadget* is more of a movie than a game. You just can't "lose" in *Gadget*. There is one brief maze element, but that's so modest and gratuitous that it constitutes a parody of the game experience. No matter what choices you make, you are certain to get to the end of the story. You start the game in this hotel room. You hear on the radio that a comet is going to hit the Earth. You go down in the hotel lobby and meet a strange man who sends you after a scientist named Horselover. You discover that this scientist is somehow involved in saving Earth from this comet. At the same time, a lot of people tell you they think this comet thing is a hoax. It's all very mysterious and spooky.

As the protagonist, you find yourself in the midst of a confusing mystery, with many conflicting testimonies and bewilder-

ing cross-threads. As you navigate through *Gadget*, you're trying to puzzle out whether there are good guys and bad guys, and whether you ought to do something to frustrate the guys you think are bad, but whenever it appears like you might be able to make some sort of a significant choice based on what you've puzzled out, you find out you don't really have any choice.

Now, it just so happens that this absence of significant choices is essential to the mystery of the protagonist's predicament. That is, the absence of a game in *Gadget* is a feature, not a flaw.

#### Interactive fiction

Computer games borrow a lot of their techniques from cinema. With all the animation, video, and recorded speech and sound you find in today's CD-ROM games, a lot of computer games are often trying to look and feel like movies.

There's a kind of entertainment software marketed as an "interactive fiction," or an "interactive movie." The star of this medium is the story. Good examples of this format are the *Living Books* by Broderbund and *Cosmic Osmo*, where the only vestige of gaming is in your navigation through the setting and the events.

There are no puzzles to frustrate your advancement through the story, and no challenges you have to overcome to get to

the next good part. There are a lot of cool things to click on and play with; that's the "interactive" part.

At this evolutionary point in entertainment software, the classic model for the medium is the game. Computers do games well. When you think of computers, you think of games.

Books and movies, on the other hand, do stories well. Sure, you'll find the odd exception, like pick-a-path books and *Clue* video movies with multiple endings, but these clearly are oddballs.

However, just because computers are ideal for presenting games doesn't mean that computer entertainment software must feature game elements in order to be a satisfying use of the medium.

Admittedly, consumer expectations for computer software are shaped by the software game experience. *Gadget* sure won't give as many hours of play as a standard computer game, so someone used to measuring his fun-per-software-buck in hours spent in front of the computer is going to feel hosed by *Gadget*. And if *Gadget* really offers no more than you could get out of a purchased videotape, you could get a lot more for your money by renting movies at your local rental store.

*Gadget* borrows several elements from computer games and uses them to achieve its narrative purposes.

It plays on the expectation of significant choices that gamers have. When you find you really don't have choices, you identify ideally with the predicament of the central character. Your bewilderment is the protagonist's bewilderment. Your discovery of your lack of real choices as a player parallels the protagonist's discovery that he doesn't have any real choices. In *Gadget*, this absence of real choices is an integral part of the menace and mystery of the protagonist's world. Something funny is going on. There are suggestions that someone is playing with people's minds. You meet characters with bizarre tales that sound like brainwashing—or worse. Are you a victim of this brainwashing? If so, what can you do about it? What can you do if you can't even trust the evidence of your own senses? Are your motivations your own? Or are they hypnotic suggestions implanted by someone else? By good guys? By bad guys?

You're a tool with no way to test the motives and means of the agents using you.

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—Emily Dickinson

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Well, maybe \$59.95 isn't so frugal for this frigate. But it does take us to other worlds. That's one of the main attractions of role-playing and computer games for me—exploring fantastic worlds. And *Gadget* does this in spades.

Travel and exploration of a fantasy world is what I enjoy most about games in general, and especially RPG and computer games. My favorite part of *Civilization*, for example, is sailing around discovering things.

*Gadget's* retro-future setting is an alternate Earth like the 1950s envisioned by 1920's minds. Most of *Gadget's* action takes place in three types of places—train stations, the train interiors, and science places (including labs and a Museum of Science). These interiors, brilliantly imagined and rendered as 3-D spaces, are a beauty to behold. And there are plenty of charmingly antique super-science gadgets to goggle at. Art and design students: feast your eyes and minds. The atmosphere and feel reminds me of Terry Gilliam's designs for the film *Brazil*, with the same subtle sense of a dark and disappointing future.

In *Gadget* though, the characters are built-from-the-ground-up realistic 3-D models, they are actually more a part of the set design, automatons rather than flesh-and-blood breathing creatures. That, in fact, is the point of *Gadget's* theme, and cleverly reinforced by its eccentric character rendering scheme.

### When minimal animation is a good thing

Graphic depictions of characters must fit the mood of a multimedia piece. *Gadget's* characters are so striking because they exploit the stylized limitations of computer-rendered characters to enhance the mood of the setting and narrative.

Only the characters' eyes move. Most animated games show standard crumby computer character depictions of cartoon stone faces with blinking eyes and burbling lips, or chunky-monkey bad video sprites. With cartoon animation, frame rate and visual detail are kept to a minimum; otherwise you'd have to pay artists to do lots of animation art, and games would move way-too-slow.

*Gadget* uses a unique strategy. It uses 3-D models of characters, then uses them as almost-completely unanimated images. Only the eyes move—not even the lips. Dialogue is displayed on black beneath a letterboxed image. Only text is displayed; the character monologues are not playbacks of recorded sound. The faces themselves have a lot of detail and personality, but no animation—not in either sense, motion or emotion—producing a perfectly dead-pan lifelessness, a zombie-like lack of animation which is chillingly at odds with the distinctively realistic detail of the faces. The characters seem like robots—and in this context, this is exactly the mood *Gadget* wants to create.

(Of course, more animation just might have been too hard for them, too.—Zeb)

### A style to fit the theme

In *Gadget*, it is the lack of choices—the lack of real game options—that fits the mood of the presentation. It is a grim, narrow, deterministic universe. From the very beginning, there are hints that the central character doesn't have real freedom to choose what he wishes to do. This is, of course, a terrible idea in a game, but a perfect idea in a setting where the mood suggests a relentless and unavoidable fate. Sometimes life seems that way too. We are told that our lives have choices, but sometimes we doubt whether those choices are meaningful.

Fantasy role-playing games are typically in the heroic tradition; the hero's actions are meaningful and result in the foiling of evil plots, the celebration of virtue, and the empowerment of the good guys. Even cyberpunk games, which are generally regarded as dark fantasies, typically depend on heroic types who triumph over adversity. *Gadget* is a very dark fantasy. The point-of-view character is bewildered and out-of-control throughout, and in the end is revealed to have had no real chance to save himself or the world. This is definitely not standard fantasy game fare—but *vive la difference*.

### Conclusion

I'm a total fan of *Gadget*. Sure, it has its warts. The interface and navigation are

rather clunky. It's often hard to move around in the 3-D spaces, with false visual cues that suggest places to go where you really can't go. It also has a pretty annoying inventory convention, where you get stuff in a briefcase, but you can't look in the briefcase until the program prompts you. And, yes, it is not a game. Not even a little.

But *Gadget* is a remarkable multimedia narrative in the software medium—original, entertaining, and absorbing. The mysterious science-fiction plot, the script, the characters, the retro-futuristic design, the spooky atmosphere, and the paranoid point-of-view protagonist all combine to produce the most satisfying multimedia experience I've ever had.

(Creepy? Yes. Striking? Yes. Spooky? Yes. Beautiful? Yes. Riveting? Yes for the first 20 minutes anyway. Then it starts to get old, real fast. Unlike Kenny, I didn't like the lack of choices in *Gadget*. On the contrary, it irritated me. I like to do stuff with my computer—to "interact" with it (to coin a phrase). Leaving the audience passive is best left to other mediums: film, TV, and theater, to name a few. I don't know: perhaps Ken's just more advanced than I, computer-wise. Or perhaps he's just stark, barking mad.—Paul)

(Lovely to look at and an intriguing story line, but this thing's as interactive as turning the page of a book.—Zeb)

Continued on page 62

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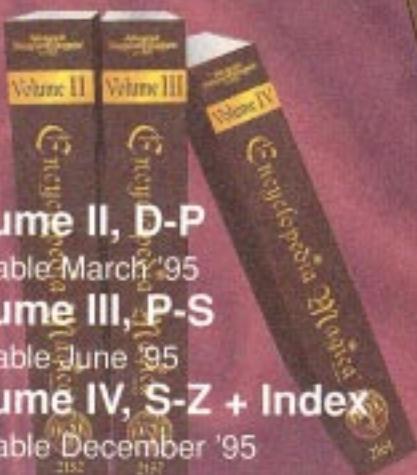
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**Volume II, D-P**

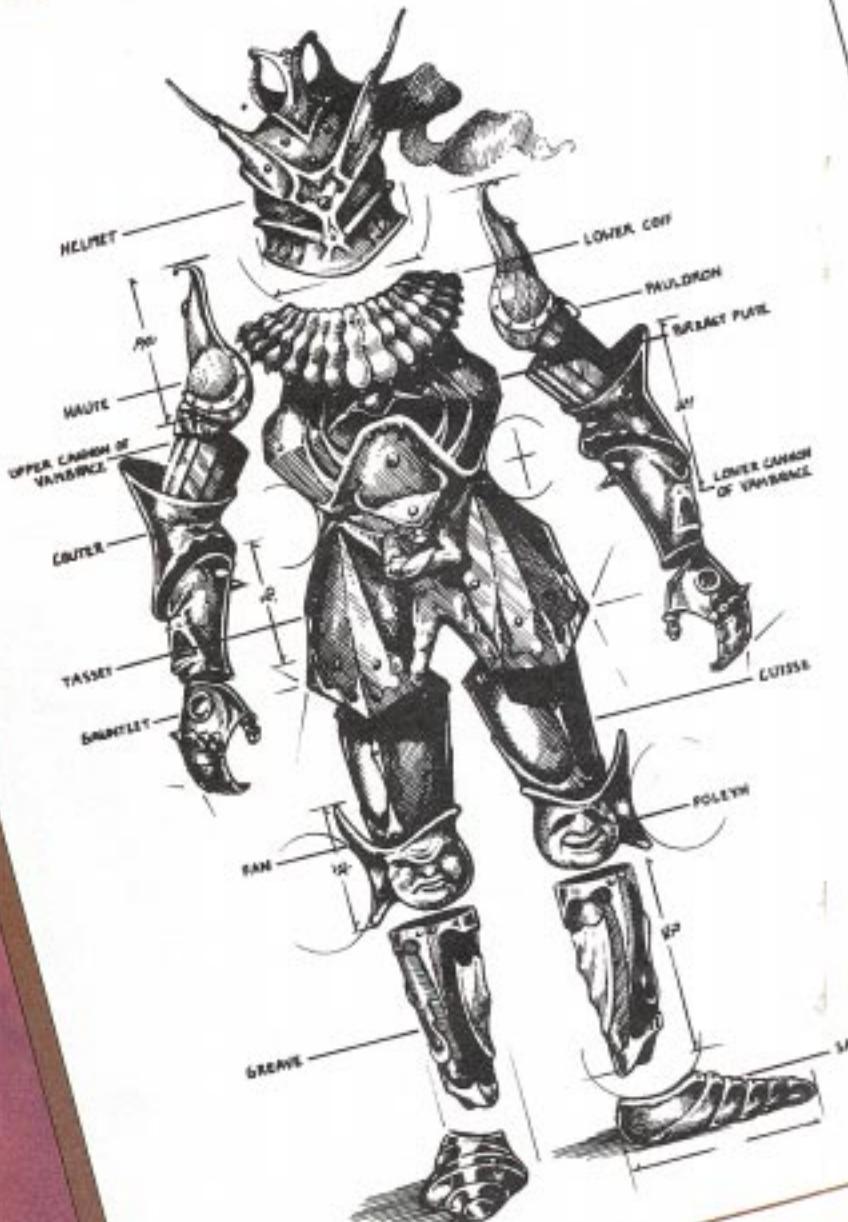
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# Volume I, A-D ON SALE NOW!

Armor of Acidic Secretion

76-90	Steel	49
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00	Mithral	4100

## Abhathor's

XP Value: — GP Value: —  
Monster Mythology

Abhathor's avatar's leather armor +4 can cast blindness at one creature per round within 30 feet (save vs. spell at -6 to negate, -3 if looking away).

## of Absorption

XP Value: 5,000 GP Value: 25,000  
Dungeons & Dragons Rules Cyclopes

If the user is hit by a blow that would cause an energy drain, this armor absorbs the draining effect and only the normal damage affects the user. Each energy drain causes the loss of one AC bonus modifier from the armor. When reduced to zero bonuses, the item crumbles to dust. (For instance, armor +3 that has absorbed two energy drain attacks now armor +1. If it absorbs yet another energy drain, it is reduced to zero and disintegrates.) The special power is not under the control of the user; character cannot choose to suffer the energy drain and leave the item intact. The normal limit of use per day does not apply to this power.

## of Acidic Secretion\*

XP Value: — GP Value: +2  
Demons Magazine 99

This cursed armor appears to be normal, magical armor, but it gives no benefit to the wearer in combat (though this is not known by the wearer). From the moment that the wearer first suffers damage while using this suit, the armor and any padding used with it secretes a corrosive acid for 1d20 rounds, causing 1d4 points of damage to the wearer each round (no saving throw). It takes a full turn (10 rounds) to remove this suit of armor, and it continues doing acidic damage during that entire time (if the secretion duration is still in effect).

Due to the nature of the acid, the blisters and blisters left by such wounds cannot be removed except by a wish, alter reality, or tempus fugit spell, although normal rest and healing does recover lost hit points. Once the 1d20 round acid-secretion period is past, the armor is once again safe to wear.

Roll	Armor Material	Cost Multiplier
01	Adamantine	450
02-05	Bronze	4.95
06-08	Copper	4.9
09-10	Electrum	4.25
11-12	Gold	4.5
13-62	Iron	4.1
63-72	Obsidian	4.75
73	Platinum	4.25
74-75	Silver	4.5



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## Quick cuts

### Gold Medallion Gamepack: 40 Best VGA Games

This is a cool, absurdly cheap gaming fix at \$16.99. It has swell Apogee games like *Duke Nukem II*, *Bio-Menace*, *Crystal Caves*, *Raptor*, *Wolfenstein 3-D*, and a *DOOM* - style 3-D game *Blake Stone* that is a real hoot. Now, this stuff is shareware, and honorable folks must immediately send lots of money to the designers or fry in hell, but you can boot up and try 40 games for the basic \$16.99—a spectacular and satisfying bargain.

### Quantum Gate

This is another interactive movie like *Gadget*, but with some more conventional game elements, such as a minor but non-gratuitous shoot-'em-up. The story is intriguing, the acting is several notches above the CD-ROM standard, and the exposition and dramatic tensions builds nicely to a climax. None of the player's choices ultimately influence the conclusion, but you do get a strong sense of the protagonist, and the moral choices he makes . . . not as a hero, but as a character deciding whether to suck up to the commander, to lie to protect a not-very attractive fellow soldier, or to avoid making commitments either way. None of it affects the outcome, but it does affect

how you feel about yourself in Griffin's shoes.

(Choices that make no difference?—Zeb)

This is interesting, but nowhere as classy, elegant, or subtle as *Gadget*. And it's a satisfying mystery—that is, I don't feel like I have to be able to influence the outcome of a multimedia product in order to find its mystery entertaining—but the climax is abrupt and clumsy. I casually recommend it as a quick, simple entertainment, and of special interest to students of narrative multimedia, but it's not much of a game, and not completely successful on its own narrative terms.

### Ken rants

Look, I'm sick of buying DOS games and playing "Game Loading Strategy." I routinely spend more time trying to get new games to run than playing them.

Case #1: Apogee's *Bio-Menace*. If I have technical problems, I'm advised to "boot with a clean disk." What's a clean disk?

Okay. I figure out how to bare-boot my machine. That's bypassing my config.sys and autoexec.bat files on start up. That's not so tough.

Case #2. Id's *Doom II*. Says "4MB RAM minimum."

Okay. Bare-boot again, right? But how's *DOOM II* going to play those lovable sounds unless I got my Soundblaster drivers loaded in my machine? Looks like I've got to make

custom boot files for *DOOM II*.

Sure. I'm a DOS dummy. I read that book. That stuffs easy. Editing config.sys and autoexec.bat files—that is not DOS dummy stuff.

I figured out a simple fix. Spend \$150 bucks on more memory.

And guess what? After spending the \$150 bucks for another four megs of RAM, *DOOM II* still won't run until I edit my config.sys and autoexec.bat files.

I bought a simple multimedia IBM as a game machine. So instead of the Joy of Gaming, I get the Torment of Custom Boots.

How many other DOS game users out there that are annoyed by this stuff! And what can be done about it?

Modest Proposal: Send us your complaints. We can't possibly answer, or maybe even read them all, if what we read on BBSes is any indication. But we can publicly share your pain.

(Look, send us your complaints, but don't feel like you have to restrict yourself to one platform. Sooner or later every game machine out there does something we all hate—and the only way they're going to know is if we tell them about it! —Zeb)

□

\* indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc.

### Get this monstrous deal at these stores!

Roaming Panther II	Glendale	AZ
Roaming Panther	Mesa	AZ
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# This one you won't want to miss.

It's been nearly three years in the making with a budget we won't even talk about. It employed a team of over a hundred people, including programmers, artists, musicians and writers as well as Hollywood make-up and special effects houses (we liked the flames in *Backdraft*™ so we hired the movie's special effects house to bring in a little heat). As the creators of *Wasteland*™ and *The Bard's Tale*™, our goal was to produce a game every bit as innovative and unique. We think you'll like the results.



We used a combination of live actors and computer generated creatures with Silicon Graphics environments and magical effects which were painstakingly rendered down to the finest crack, doorway and magical lightning storm.

## The Game's the Thing

A combination of traditional role playing and interactive story-telling, *Stonekeep* mixes a detailed storyline and character interaction with puzzle-solving, magic systems, character attributes and combat. It all comes together in a system that allows for quality story-telling combined with a powerful, yet easy-to-use control system (intuitive without being watered down).



## Art and Stuff

Graphically, the game is state-of-the-art stunning (we're a little biased but check out the screenshots for yourself).



## The Box, the Book and Story

The packaging is every bit as cool as the game. Shipping in a special tombstone-shaped, hologram box, the package starts you on your quest "through dark corridors, treacherous sewers and subterranean realms of faeries, magick and the living dead." (We had to throw a bit of marketing hype in here somewhere.) Along with the skeleton hologram cover, you also get a limited edition, hard-bound *Stonekeep* novella by Steve Jackson and David Pulver.



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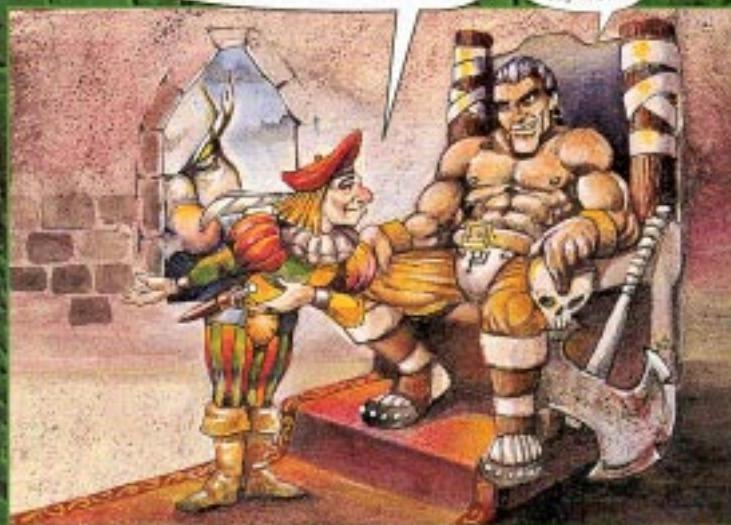


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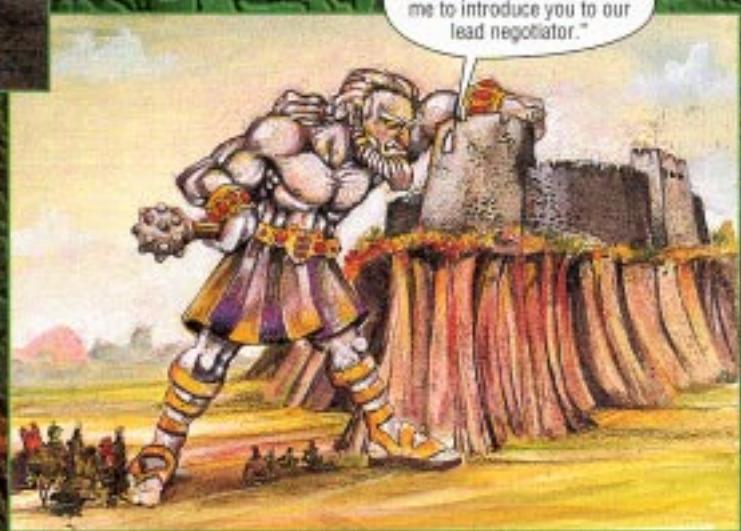
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- ⇒ **Convention Hours:** 8 a.m. to Midnight Friday and Saturday and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday.
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- ⇒ There is a parking garage adjacent to the Hyatt Regency. The hotel features three restaurants, and there are other restaurants and sandwich shops within a few blocks of the Hyatt.
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- ⇒ **Preregistration:** Sign up now to attend the WINTER FANTASY convention and receive discount admission.
- ⇒ **RAVENS BLUFF™ Interactive:** Thursday evening, February 9th, the Network offers a special Living City event for members only. Sign up for *Debutante Ball* and bring your favorite LC character. The event runs from 6 p.m. to Midnight.
- ⇒ **Don't delay!** For more information and a registration form, write to:  
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# Tournament Registration And Judge Form

	Friday	Saturday		Sun					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
RPGA® Network AD&D® Feature <i>A Matter of Trust</i> by Theron Martin	★		★		★	★		F	
RPGA Network AD&D Special/Masters <i>Piper's Hill</i> by Carla Hollar and Nicky Rea		★		★		★		F	
RPGA Network AD&D Grand Masters <i>Members 5th level and up</i> <i>Marius the Majestyk</i> by T. Steed & T. Lambertson	★					★	★		
RPGA Network AD&D Benefit (\$5 charity event) <i>Only Halflings Need Apply</i> by John D. Rateliff		★		★		★		★	
RPGA Network AD&D Survival of the Fittest Event <i>Sands of Fire</i> by Kevin Melka			★			★		★	
RPGA Network AD&D Surprise <i>Great Gumballs</i> , by Jeff Grigsby and Mike Dever				★					★
RPGA Network AD&D Club Event <i>Tensions</i> by David Baker		★					★		
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RPGA Network Living City Gold <i>Members only</i> <i>Slugfest</i> by James Alan	★		★			★	★	★	
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RPGA Network MALATRA The Living Jungle II <i>Members only</i> <i>Along the River of the Laughing Idol</i> by Tom Prusa		★			★			★	
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Plus, many other events will be available on site!

## Convention Registration Form

**Fees:**  Preregistration \$15  OR Judge preregistration \$10  
 Benefit tournaments: \$5 each  Network Breakfast: \$15

Total fees I have enclosed (Check or Money Order only): \_\_\_\_\_

I want to judge! I have indicated with a "J" those events above I would like to run and the time slots I desire.  
 I want to run my own event. I've attached a description and marked the times I want the event to run.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip/Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail this form and your payment to: RPGA Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI 53147**

★ = single round  
or first of two rounds  
F = final round

# Convention Calendar

## Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines **must** be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing **must** include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. **No** call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

**WARNING:** We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

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**Important:** DRAGON® Magazine no longer publishes phone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is a nuisance to both the caller and those receiving the misdirected call. Be certain that any address given is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

## ALBUQUERQUE GAME FAIR, Dec. 2-4 MO

This convention will be held at Quality Hotel, Four Seasons in Albuquerque, Mo. Guests include Richard Garfield, Doug Shuler, and Darwin Bromley. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include collectible card games, anime, seminars, an auction, and panels. Benefits to go to the Carrie Tingley Foundation. Registration: \$15. Write to: P.O. Box 44396, Rio Rancho NM 87174-4396.

## MAGIC\* GAME TOURNAMENTS '94

Dec. 3-4

AZ

This convention will be held at the DuBois Conference Center at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Az. Events include multiple MAGIC game tournaments. Registration cost varies with number of tournaments entered. Write to: Little Shop of Magic, 2515 N. Fort Valley Rd. #4, Flagstaff AZ 86001.

## SOUTHWEST COMIC FESTIVAL

Dec. 9-11

TX

This convention will be held at the Austin Convention Center in Austin, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a costume contest, art and miniatures contests, films, anime, and panels. Registration: \$25 preregistered, plus \$10 for a comprehensive gaming pass. Write to: SWCF, P.O. Box 650201, Austin TX 78765-0201.

## WINTER MAGIC '94

WI

This collectible card game/comics convention will be held at the Marriott Hotel in Brookfield, Wis. Events include sanctioned MAGIC tournaments. Other activities include comics guests and dealers. Registration: \$5. Write to: Comics Express, 6562 W. Brown Deer Rd., Brown Deer WI 53223.

## DARCON II, Jan. 7-8, 1995

◆  
This convention will be held at the Danie Van Zyl Recreation Centre in Newlands, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include demos, competitions, and dealers. Registration: R10 plus variable event fees. Write to: Evan Dembsky, 24 Vincent Rd., Rosettenville ext, Johannesburg, Transvaal, Republic of South Africa, 2197.

## GAMES UNIVERSITY, Jan. 13-16

CA

This demo-oriented game convention will be held at the Red Lion Hotel in Ontario, Calif. Guests include Darwin Bromley. Events include family and adventure role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer and video games, seminars, and dealers. Registration: \$22/weekend before Dec. 31; \$25/weekend on site. Write to: GAMES UNIV., c/o Ultraviolet Prod., P.O. Box 668, Upland CA 91785.

## RUNEQUEST\*CON 2, Jan. 13-16

CA

This convention will be held at the San Francisco Clarion Hotel in San Francisco, Calif. Guests include Greg Stafford, Sandy Petersen, and Steve Perrin. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars and an auction. Registration: \$30/weekend or \$15/day. Write to: RUNEQUEST\*CON 2, 2520 Hillegass Ave. #101, Berkeley CA 94707.

## CONSTITUTION III, Jan. 20-22

MD

This convention will be held at the Best Western Maryland Inn in Laurel, Md. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events. Registration: \$17 preregistered; \$22 on site. Write to: Chesapeake Games, P.O. Box 13607, Silver Spring MD 20911-3607.

## ROUNDCON '95, Jan. 27-29

SC

This convention will be held at the Quality Inn N.E. in Columbia, S.C. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, contests, a scavenger hunt, and a charity auction. Registration: \$15 on site. Write to: Trella Wilhite, Round Table Gaming Soc., USC P.O. Box 80018, Columbia SC 29225.

## WARPCon V, Jan. 27-29

\*

This convention will be held at University College, Cork, Ireland. Guests include Bill Bridges. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars and contests. Write to: Convention Director, WARPCon V, Office of Residence and Student Activities, University College, Cork, IRELAND; or e-mail: ARHN6001@Iruccvax.ucc.ie.

- ❖ indicates an Australian convention.
- ✿ indicates a Canadian convention.
- indicates a European convention.
- ◊ indicates an African convention

**GAMEFEST II, Jan. 28**

IL

This convention will be held at Holy Innocents Church, Fr. Pajak Hall, in Chicago, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events and raffles. Registration: \$3/general; \$5/tournament. All proceeds go to Holy Innocents Church. Write to: John Kavain, 857 N. Hermitage, Chicago IL 60622.

**NORMAN CONQUEST VI, Feb. 3-5** **OK**

This convention will be held at the Oklahoma Memorial Union on the Oklahoma University campus in Norman, Okla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events. Registration: \$9. Write to: NORMAN CONQUEST VI, 215-A OMU Box 304, 900 Asp Ave., Norman OK 73019.

**WINTER WAR XXII, Feb. 3-5** **IL**

This convention will be held at the Chancellor Hotel in Champaign, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include open gaming, dealers, auctions, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$6 preregistered; \$8 on site, plus \$2 event fee. Judges are welcome. Send an SASE to: Donald McKinney, 986 Pomona Dr., Champaign IL 61821.

**CLUB CON 4, Feb. 4-5** **OH**

This convention will be held at the Independence Holiday Inn in Cleveland, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events. Registration: \$13 preregistered; \$15 on

site. Send an SASE to: CLUB CON 4, P.O. Box 16161, Rocky River OH 44116-0161.

**CAPRICON XV, Feb. 16-19**

IL

This convention will be held at Wyndham Hamilton Hotel in Itasca, Ill. Guests include Nancy Kress, Lucy Synk, and Sue Blom. Events include anime, panels, demos, workshops, film, a cabaret, a masquerade dance, art shows, and a blood drive. Registration: \$30 before Jan. 15; \$40 on site. Write to: CAPRICON XV, P.O. Box 60085, Chicago IL 60660.

**GENGHIS CON XVI, Feb. 17-19** **CO**

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Southeast in Denver, Colo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer gaming, a figure-painting contest, auctions, and dealers. Registration: \$15 preregistered. Write to: Denver Gamers Assoc., P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044.

**KATSUCON ONE, Feb. 17-19** **VA**

This anime/manga convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, Va. Activities include panels, workshops, an amateur film fest, an art show, dance, and anime. Registration: \$26 before Dec. 31; \$30 on site. Write to: Katsu Prod., P.O. Box 11582, Blacksburg VA 24062-1582; or e-mail at: katsucon@vtserf.cc.vt.edu.

**ORCCON 18, Feb. 18-20** **CA**

This convention will be held at Airport Hyatt Hotel in Los Angeles, Calif. Events include all types of family, strategy, and adventure board,

role-playing, miniatures, and computer gaming. Other activities include flea markets, an auction, dealers, seminars, and demos. Registration: \$25 preregistered; \$30 on site. Write to: STRATEGICON, P.O. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849.

**JAXCON '95, Feb. 24-26**

FL

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn Conference Center in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include door prizes, dealers, and a flea market. Registration: \$15 before Jan. 1; \$22 on site. Single-day rates are available. Write to: JAXCON, P.O. Box 14218, Dep't M, Jacksonville FL 32238-4218.

**RADCON 1C, Feb. 24-26**

WA

This convention will be held at the Best Western Tower Inn in Richland, Wa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, dealers, an art show, movies, demos, and gaming. Registration: \$18. Write to: RADCON 1C, 2527 W. Kennewick Ave., #162, Kennewick WA 99336.

**WARP'DCON V, Mar. 4**

NJ

This convention originally was scheduled to take place Dec. 4, 1994. It will be held at Drew University in Madison, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, a raffle, an auction, and door prizes. Registration: \$5. Write to: Richard Ditullio, P.O. Box 802, C.M. Box 1405, Madison NJ 07940.

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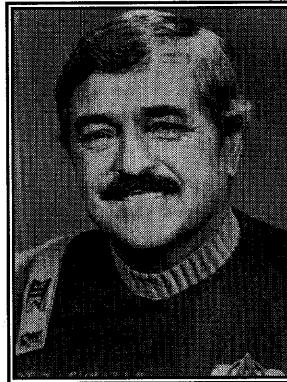


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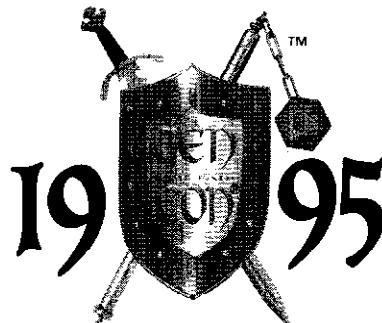
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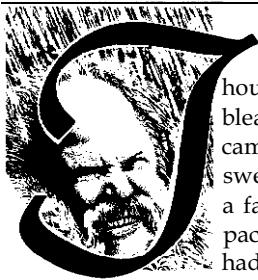
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ough it was the day before the bleakest Midwinter in memory, I came upon the village of Half Day sweating like a blacksmith in August a fact I attributed to the three-stone pack and the one-stone broad sword I had on my back.

The broad sword was for show. I could barely lift the thing, let alone swing it in any meaningful fashion. But my father—pardon me, my foster father—Sir Gavin of Half Day, had the sword specially made for me when he sent me out into the world. He said a broad sword was the only fit weapon for a knight—never mind the fact that I'm perhaps half his size. Anyway, it seemed rude to return home without it.

I had failed utterly as Sir Bradagast's squire. I wasn't sure what my calling was, but I'm no knight, despite Sir Gavin's fond hopes. Bradagast gave me as much of a trial as he had the patience for, but he said that in the end blood would tell, and unfortunately I hadn't enough of my father's. Apparently he had forgotten that no one was supposed to know who my father was.

Bradagast even kept the horse I'd been using while I served as his squire. No one ever accused him of being generous with those below his station. So I was crunching through the ice-coated grasses on foot, trying to come up with an explanation for why I had no horse, when I topped a rise and saw the orchards of Half Day below. It was breathtaking, though the farmers would curse me for saying that. There's nothing worse than the weight of an ice coating for damaging fruit trees.

Just then the clouds broke and a shaft of sunlight shone down, making the apple and pear trees—and the pines that shielded them—sparkle like diamonds. A wind came up, and clouds covered the sky again. It looked like the White Wizard was about to unleash more bad weather. Maybe just snow, but probably more of the freezing rain that had made my trip from Miles Cross so damned unpleasant.

Half Day was just through those trees, with Sir Gavin's manor on the far side of the cottages. Lady Elaine, Sir Gavin's wife, would not be pleased to see me, but she wouldn't deny me hospitality, especially on Midwinter Eve. *Noblesse oblige*, after all. And I would have to forget my dislike of her, if only temporarily. For now, I needed shelter.

The village was quiet except for the wind and sleet. Behind shuttered windows, the glow of hearth fires struggled against the early gloom.

One cottage, dark as a crypt, stood out from the others. It was my mother's house, abandoned for twelve years since the day Sir Gavin had come and taken me off to foster at his manor.

I'd hated it at Sir Gavin's. Oh, he'd been kind enough to me, in his preoccupied way, but Lady Elaine made my life a misery. Three days after I was taken to the manor house, I crept away from my studies to see my mother. The house was empty. I asked the nearest neighbor where Mother was, and was told that she'd simply disappeared the day after I went to Sir Gavin's. She told no one where she was going.

I feared some harm must have come to her and sought out Sir Gavin, begging him to organize a search. He just patted me awkwardly on the shoulder. "She's all right," he

# Winter Tale

by Catherine Brennan

Illustrations by Larry Smith

said. "But she won't be back. Best if you forget her."

An icy pellet on my cheek brought me back to myself. The storm that had been threatening broke out in full force. The White Wizards was at his most wrathful; ice hurtled earthward as if shot from thousands of bows. I hurried to Sir Gavin's house.

Thomas, the old steward, looked none too pleased to see me.

"Well, uh, how you been keeping, Reynard?"

"Tolerably, Thomas," I said. "May I come in?"

"I—yes, surely." He eyed me uncertainly. "I'll tell the mistress you're here."

"Do me a favor, Tom," I said, digging in my pouch for my last gold sovereign. His rheumy eyes gleamed as I fished around, finally feeling its satisfying weight among the coppers and two thin silvers that comprised all my wealth. I placed the sovereign in his palm. "Take me to the master instead."

"Good idea, sir." He winked at me. I was not too surprised at my sudden elevation in status. "The mistress is powerful busy, what with the fete tonight."

"Fete?" I followed him to the library.

"Yes. The pageant's tonight, sir. Surely you remember?"

I did remember, then. Every Midwinter Eve, the villagers presented a seasonal entertainment for Sir Gavin and his family, much as Rosalinda's Players do for the Duke of Bay Town. The production is not in the same league, of course, but Half Day is a much smaller place, and Sir Gavin hasn't the funds to support real actors.

After the pageant, Sir Gavin always gave small gifts to the villagers. Refreshments were provided by Lady Elaine. She must be supervising their preparation.

"Well, then, I've arrived just in time." I believe I succeeded in sounding jovial, though the last thing I wanted at that moment was to mingle with the folk of Half Day.

Tom knocked on the library door. A voice from within said, "Enter."

I waited in the hall. Tom went in and said, "Young Reynard has returned."

"Oh, Daglu!" The oath was uttered in a sharp, feminine voice. Lady Elaine was no fonder of me now than she had been when I was under her care. "Are you going to let that liar back in?"

She had been anxious to see me given as a squire; I had once made the mistake of claiming Sir Gavin as my father. From then on, she referred to me as "that liar," and couldn't get me out of her house fast enough. I promise you, I have gained some finesse since then, but how could Lady Elaine have known?

"Now, dear," Sir Gavin said. "Remember the season. Show him in, Thomas."

Tom motioned me in. The library was as I remembered it. There were a few books, well tended but in no danger of having their spines damaged. Numerous hunting trophies—bear, boar, deer—were given more pride of place. Sir Gavin and Lady Elaine sat before a crackling fire, but when she saw me, the lady rose.

"Well," she said, "I have much to do. I know you will excuse me, Reynard."

"Yes, my Lady." I bowed, adding a little flourish I had seen Sir Bradagast use on formal occasions. My elegance found no favor with Lady Elaine. If anything, her thin

nose went higher into the air.

"How have you been getting on with Bradagast, my boy?" Sir Gavin motioned me to take the seat Lady Elaine had just forsaken. Lady Elaine hovered near the door, obviously listening.

A demon possessed me at that moment; otherwise I might have tried to prepare him for the unpleasant truth. But with his unlovely wife there, I just couldn't do it.

"Wonderfully," I told him. "I saved Sir Bradagast's life so many times that he finally decided I was ready for knighthood. I told him I'd rather you knighted me." I saw Lady Elaine still at the door and let my demon say a bit more. "After all, you've been *like* a father to me, sir."

"Yes, quite." Sir Gavin glanced wifeward and cleared his throat. "Here, let me pour you some wine, Reynard."

Lady Elaine left, in a dignified sweep of gown. I watched the door close behind her and turned back to look at Sir Gavin.

"Now, tell me how you saved Bradagast's life," he said. I cleared my throat, wondering how best to tell him the truth. Now that his wife was gone, there was no excuse for deceiving him. Gavin set down the bottle and handed a glass to me. "He's not getting any younger, is he?"

"Who?"

"Bradagast, of course." Gavin smiled at me, the furrows around his blue eyes reminding me that he, too, was no longer young.

I couldn't disappoint him then. "It was nothing," I mumbled.

"Don't be so modest, Reynard," he said. "Give me something to tell Elaine. She's always believed you'd come to nothing."

Gavin's statement made me lose my weak grasp on honesty. Perhaps he had meant for it to. I suspected he didn't want to know the truth, if it meant learning that I wasn't the warrior he wanted me to be. Well, it would be at least spring before he could learn the truth. By that time I could surely decide what to do with myself, and my plans would not include living in Half Day. So I told Sir Gavin a few tales of Bradagast's prowess, making myself the hero.

I was Sir Gavin's guest of honor at the pageant. It was easier than I expected. All I had to do was look modest while Sir Gavin recounted my brave deeds. As I had thought, my knightly attire went a long way toward evoking respect from the villagers. Men who'd beaten me to a bloody pulp when we were children now touched the rims of their rough woolen caps to me. Even Big Elmo, the smith's son, had the wit to seem respectful, as though he hadn't defeated me several dozen times in my youth.

The pageant was like two score others that were being held throughout Faland that night. Some foolery, some dancing, some pantomime—all quite amateurish. No doubt Rosalinda's Players could do better in their sleep.

The highlight of the evening was always the pantomime of Kieran and the White Wizard. I was looking forward to it, anticipating Kieran's clever defeat of the White Wizard and the scanty linen gowns that the torch-bearing maidens wear at the end as they lead out the Spring Child. I had played that part myself—the Spring Child, that is—when I was about seven, and I always enjoyed seeing who they chose to play it in later years. But that evening, we did not

see the usual version of the legend.

Kieran—not the usual clever youth, but *Sir* Kieran in this version—was played by Big Elmo wearing pots and pans to signify armor. The White Wizard, garbed in white with black and silver trim, was played to unusually sinister effect by Half Day's master beekeeper. The elderly village cleric, who usually played the White Wizard, had apparently been confined to his bed with illness for several weeks.

With Big Elmo as the hero, clever dexterity was no longer possible. Rather than defeating the White Wizard in a tiddlywinks match, Sir Kieran promised to slaughter Winter and bring perpetual summer. Winter, meanwhile, was determinedly evil and vengeful, sending bitter winds and freezing rain to punish the village and hamper Kieran's progress.

I wondered whether this new version of the legend had the cleric's sanction. The old fellow had always said the White Wizard was not evil, but merely an instrument of Daghlus. "Daghlus hasn't time to see to every detail in the world," he'd say. "That's why we have the Season Spirits and the Lords of the Elements. But even they are subject to the All-Giver's will."

I glanced at Sir Gavin to see what he thought of the villager's revision of the traditional tale. His cheery expression had vanished. Lady Elaine had grown frosty as well. I couldn't blame them; this new version was no improvement over the old.

True to his promise, Sir Kieran killed his foe in an amazing combat during which the White Wizard pulled all sorts of improbable things from his sleeves and out of the air, all done with visible strings and pulleys, sad to say. I'm afraid seeing Rosalinda's Players perform in Miles Cross has forever spoiled amateur theatricals for me.

Finally, with one mighty thrust of his sword, Kieran wounded the White Wizard fatally in the armpit. When Winter finally stopped milking his death scene, our rustic Sir Kieran placed his foot on the villain's throat and claimed victory. No flower-draped child came out as Spring, though the torch-bearing maidens were still in evidence. Tampering with tradition only goes so far, and apparently I wasn't the only one who would have been annoyed had the maidens been absent.

I was so relieved it was over that I clapped quite enthusiastically at the end. The cleric had seen none of it, so it seemed safe to show the maidens my appreciation. It took me several seconds to realize that Sir Gavin and Lady Elaine were uncharacteristically restrained,

"Didn't you care for it, sir?"

"A blatant attempt to embarrass me into action," Sir Gavin said through clenched teeth. "As if I could ride out to challenge the White Wizard. At my age, and with this rheumatism."

"Surely they don't expect that, sir. The cleric would never approve of your attacking a Season Spirit, would he?"

"Yes, well, you notice the cleric is conspicuously absent," Sir Gavin said glumly. "It's clear even he is dismayed by the harshness of this winter. All this ice so early in the season—half a dozen of our fruit trees are already ruined. He hasn't been able to sway the White Wizard through prayer, so he's told the peasants that a hero is needed. That's why they made Kieran a knight, I'll wager. And do you see any other knights around here?"

"No, sir," I said.

Suddenly I became uncomfortably aware that he was staring at me. Lady Elaine smiled evilly and said, "It might be just the quest to prove his worth!"

"What?" I said, stupidly.

"Capital idea, my dear!" Sir Gavin beamed. "What do you say, Reynard? You can ride out tomorrow and be back in time to be knighted on Ground Hog Day."

Tears gathered in his eyes, and he drew me to him and squeezed me until I nearly fainted from loss of breath. Then he held me out at arm's length and gazed at me fondly. "I was knighted on Ground Hog Day myself, my boy. And to think of my own—"

A sharp cough from Lady Elaine interrupted his fervor.

"My own, uh, foster son being knighted on the same day! It warms me, my boy."

In no time, the room hummed with the news that I would deliver the village from the wrath of the White Wizard. Since several of the linen-clad maidens came to discuss the rumor with me, I found that I did not mind the rumor-spreading too much.

I was accepting some hard cider when Sir Gavin clapped me on the back and suggested that we leave the villagers to their merriment. I tried to convince him that he ought to let me stay for a while, but he wouldn't hear of it.

"No, my boy, tonight you must make a vigil. It's not yet midnight, but you'll want to begin your fasting and praying soon. The portrait gallery will be just the place. Inspiring, all those ancestors looking down. That's where I made my vigil, you know."

I was sorely vexed at that. I don't know if it was more from the annoyance of being forced to part from a particularly sweet little brown-haired maiden, or from countless past injuries, but I said, "Those are your ancestors, sir. Surely you'll allow me to choose a place more meaningful to me."

He just looked at me for several moments. Lady Elaine stared as if she could not believe my presumption. Then, as her husband seemed incapable of speech, she said, "Where might that be?"

"In my mother's house." I looked at Lady Elaine. Her mouth worked indignantly for several moments but nothing came out. I bowed to Sir Gavin, then turned and walked from the hall.

The storm was over; a full moon brought a luster to the glazed village. I took a deep breath and congratulated myself on my presence of mind. Staying at the old cottage would give me a chance to get some sleep instead of wearing myself out praying and fasting before the journey.

Not that I intended to challenge the White Wizard, of course. I had no more interest in interfering in magical or religious matters than had Sir Gavin. In the morning, I would travel north until out of sight of the village, then double back and head for warmer climes. It was too bad I wouldn't be able to winter in Half Day, but perhaps Sir Gavin would make me a nice little gift before I left, to ease my travel.

He would wonder what had happened, come Ground Hog Day. Perhaps he would mourn me as a lost hero, dead in service to Half Day. I actually felt tears come to my eyes, thinking how he would regret losing me on this ridiculous quest. But at least I would be a failed knight, instead of "that liar."

I pried the planks off the door of my mother's cottage with my broad sword, enjoying the thought of Sir Gavin's distress if he saw me using his gift that way. Then I laughed aloud at myself—even as a man, I was only capable of rebelling when there was no one to see me.

The cottage was freezing. There was nothing in it save the dust and rot of a decade and a portrait of Sir Gavin's father that hung above the hearth. I wrapped myself in my cloak and sought out the area that was most free of drafts—a nook beside the hearth. Using my pack as a pillow, I lay there, wishing I could sleep.

I must have gotten my wish, for I woke to pounding. After a moment, I realized someone was at the door of the cottage, and rose stiffly to open it.

Sir Gavin stood there, outlined by the sparkling light reflected from the ice on nearby trees. "May I come in?"

"It's your house, isn't it?" I stepped aside and let him enter.

"Last night you said it was your mother's."

"She's been gone a long time." I wondered if he would answer me now if I asked him about my mother. "I'm surprised you've let it stand empty so long."

He heard my indirect question. "It was a gift to her—your mother. I thought she would want you to have it, so I waited to see if you'd want it."

I looked pointedly around the small cottage. "Not much of a house for a knight, is it?"

He turned away from me to stare at the portrait of his father. "No. You wouldn't want it if you were a knight. But if that . . . failed . . ."

So he hadn't been blind to my inadequacies after all. "If that failed," I said coldly, "you thought I would be content to come back and tend your orchards and your fields. Well I won't, I promise you!" And with that I stalked from the cottage.

Out in the yard a fine roan stallion, saddled and laden with packs, stood next to Sir Gavin's gray. There was a going-away present for me after all. I sprang into the saddle and was off before Sir Gavin could stop me.

I was two days north of Half Day before I came to my senses. I set up camp in a howling storm that my tent was unable to fully shut out. What could I have been thinking of, riding toward the White Wizard's domain, and in the garb of a knight? I far more resembled the clever youth of the real legend than I did the warrior of Half Day's mangled version. At least, I did when I was thinking straight. Once I'd had time to consider, I realized that any clever youth worth his salt would stay as far away from the White Wizard as possible, especially as the White Wizard's rage grew more fearsome the farther north I traveled.

Well, I couldn't leave in the dark after a full day's travel. But first thing in the morning, I'd head back south, steering clear of Half Day.

I hadn't reckoned on the treachery of my horse. When I awoke the next morning, I saw that he'd broken his tether. He was nowhere to be seen, and the blowing snow covered any tracks he might have left. Luckily, there was a stream that roughly paralleled the road to the east of my camp; I'd watered the horse there several times during the journey. With any luck, he'd be somewhere near it.

I called for him as I walked to the east, or what I assumed was east. I knew I had set up my tent just west of the road, so if I walked straight out of my tent and crossed the road, I would come to the stream eventually.

The snow blew so thick I never knew when I crossed the road, but I stumbled about for what seemed like an hour before I finally realized that I was no closer to the stream than I had been when I started. Or if I was, I had no way of knowing it. I hadn't found my horse either, but if the creature was still alive and had any brains, both of which were doubtful, he'd eventually find his way back to my camp. I'd best get back there myself; the snow was blowing ferociously. My tent would provide some protection until the weather improved.

I made an about-face and followed my footprints back until I reached a place where the snow filled them in. After that, I could only hope I was traveling in the right direction. I traveled somewhat longer than I had traveled away from the camp before I began to get nervous.

I continued moving about in the blizzard, keeping up a steady stream of self-abuse. I found I could castigate myself with more ease than I could make any real progress. Still, I kept on the move. My plight seemed only marginally grimmer when the gray light faded away, leaving me in darkness and the deepening cold.

Something flashed in the corner of my eye, and I turned to stare in that direction. I could just make out a distant light through the snow. I went toward the light as fast as I could stumble. As I drew nearer, I could see a tower, perhaps twenty feet high. The light came from a window too high for me to reach from the ground.

I walked around the base of the tower until I found a stout wooden door. I knocked, but there was no reply. I pushed the door open a few inches. A chime sounded as I squeezed inside. I froze and looked around. Light flickered in a square opening in the ceiling. The floor was covered with straw, and I could hear horses snorting and the lowing of a cow. I could make out three stalls in the far right corner. The wall opposite the one with the animals was lined with casks and large sacks.

I stepped further into the room. The casks and sacks were filled with ale, flour, and other foodstuffs, as I had suspected. Snow blew in through a few cracks, but on the whole, the barn level of the tower provided better shelter than I'd had since I left Half Day. I had no bedroll, but I found some horse blankets and straw.

The only way I saw to the upper story of the tower was through the square hole in the ceiling. Bradagast would never have left the rest of the tower unexplored before bedding down, but I decided not to bother with it. I saw no ladder, for one thing. The tower's owner must have pulled it up for the night, leading me to believe that he was now asleep. The light that drew me here must have been from a hearth fire. I'd stay quiet below him and be gone before he stirred in the morning.

I'd just settled into an empty stall when I heard a muffled shout. I couldn't make out all of it, but I definitely heard "Help!" repeated several times. The shouts issued from the square hole overhead. I don't know how the tower's resident knew I was there, but I couldn't ignore the plea. How could I get up there, though?

I could just make out a plank at the edge of the square

hole overhead, which might be a ladder. I looked about the stable, hoping to see something that might help me pull it down. Finally, in a corner, I found an old sledge runner. The curved end just might hook onto one of the ladder rungs and allow me to ease it down through the hole. I pulled the runner under the opening, lifted it parallel to my body and then heaved it up through the hole, moving it around until I felt it hook against something that I hoped was the first rung of the ladder. I strained at the runner until whatever I had hooked appeared in the opening. It *was* a ladder. I pulled, maneuvering the end through the hole, and promptly lost control of my burden. The ladder hurtled through the hole, landing with an echoing "thunk!" on the stable floor.

I climbed up. To my left, a heavy black velvet drapery, embroidered in silver thread with mysterious symbols, hung in a wide doorway I had no desire to accost a magician. I looked to see if there was anything else on this level and saw a bound wooden door roughly opposite the curtain. I was about to look through that door when another yell rent the stillness. It came from behind the curtain. I drew a deep breath, pulled the curtain aside, and stepped through.

I let the curtain fall behind me and shivered. At first I thought it was from fear. Then I realized it was nearly as cold in this room as it was outside.

A moonlike globe floated below the center of the ceiling, illuminating the room palely. A cluttered bookshelf jutted out from the wall to the left. On the right wall hung a map, with an irregular portion framed by red tacked-up ribbon. The center of the room was dominated by a huge table with a black box on top. A thick gray cloud hovered over the box.

On the floor against the bookshelf lay a snoring, blanket-swathed man. I could smell the ale on him from where I stood.

"Don't die on me now, dammit!" A querulous tenor voice, vibrant with anger, issued suddenly from behind the box. I nearly jumped out of my skin; a shriek escaped me without my meaning it to.

"So, Festus, have you finally decided to wake up? Well, you've ruined it." As he spoke, the cloud grew thinner and started to disperse in a line mist. The speaker continued. "This time I mean it—no more ale for you when I'm doing a blizzard. Now bring me the sprinkling can."

I reached behind myself, searching for the opening in the curtain.

"Festus!" The owner of the voice peered around the box. He proved to be a small gray-haired man swathed in bushy white furs. Frost clung to his eyebrows and mustache. He stared at me. "You're not Festus."

"No. He's, uh—" I pointed inarticulately at the sleeper in front of the shelves.

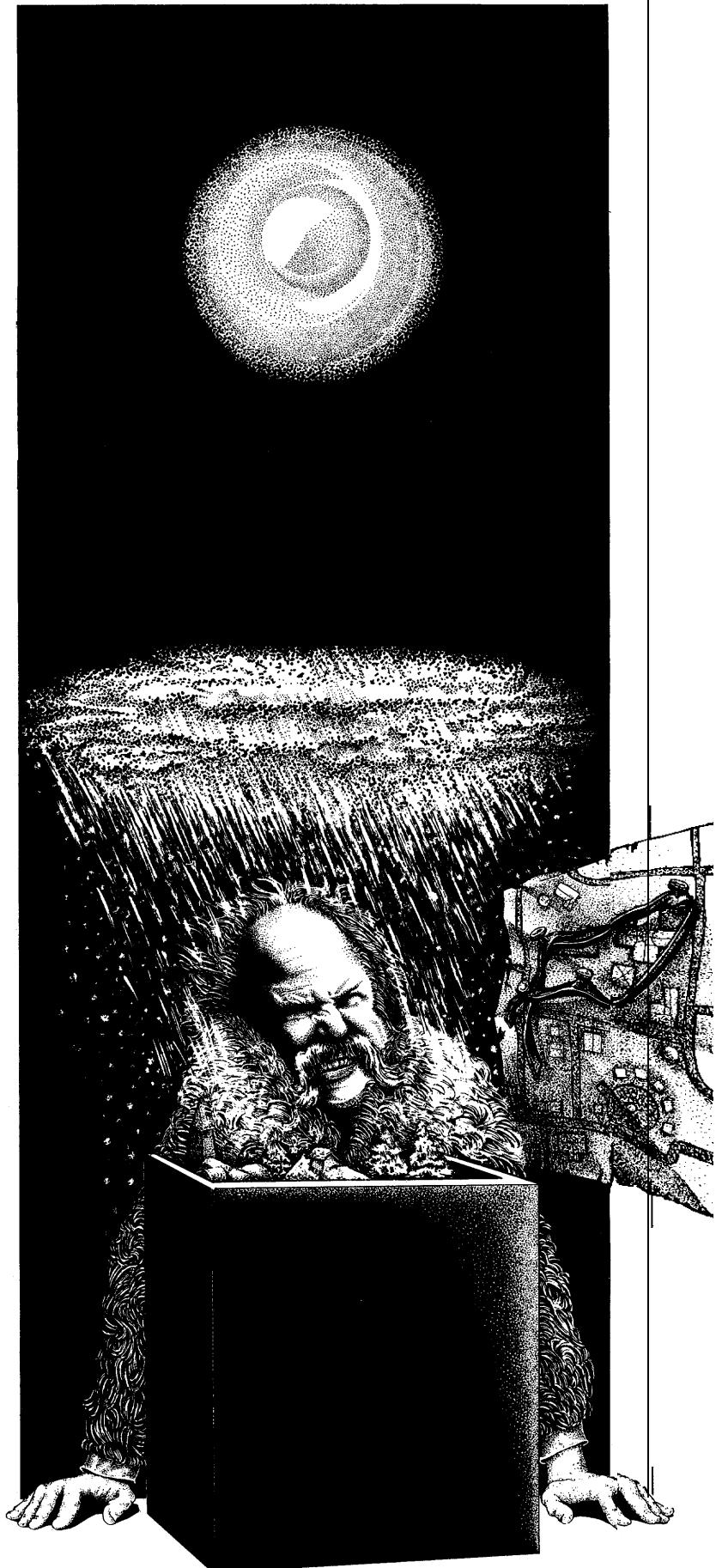
The old man looked where I had indicated and snorted, "Still sleeping it off. Who the hell are you?"

"A traveler, seeking shelter from the storm," I said. It seemed the safest answer.

"Wonderful!" The old man looked disgusted. "It's not enough I have to work in a moldy cow byre. Now I have to put up with whoever chooses to disturb me." He looked heavenward. "What have I done to deserve this?"

"I'm sorry I disturbed you," I said. "I'll go."

"No, you might as well make yourself useful." He waved



his hand toward the shelves. "Fill up the sprinkling can and bring it here." He disappeared behind the black box.

I went to the shelf and searched. Finally I came across a bronze watering can. I broke the film of ice on top of the water in a barrel I found in a far corner, filled the can, and brought it to the old man.

He mumbled unintelligibly, waving his arms in front of the black box. I could now see he was facing the fourth side, which was open. Inside the box were small rolling hills covered with ice-coated grasses the thickness of hairs. A trail wound through the tiny landscape, as did a rushing stream, which ended abruptly at the black wall of the box.

The old man continued to wave his arms but interrupted his mumbling to say, "Well, come on! Sprinkle!"

I lifted the can uncertainly.

"Higher! And over the stage, you idiot, or the sky will clear completely and I'll have to start from scratch."

I held the can higher and began to pour. The water, when it reached the top of the box, misted and formed a cloud, which thickened as I continued to pour.

"Not so fast!" the old man growled. I pulled the can back, slowing the flow to a trickle.

I couldn't see down into the box past the cloud he and I were making, but it occurred to me that the landscape in the box could easily be a replica for the outside terrain. Like it or not, I was standing elbow to elbow with my nemesis.

"Sir?" I was surprised to hear my voice squeak.

"What?" He spoke sharply and continued his gesturing.

"Could you be—that is, are you the dread White Wizard?"

The old man's mouth dropped open. "Dread—well, I like that! Damned peasant! I—" He looked at his cloud, which once again had started to fizzle. "Oh, I give up!" He waved the back of his hand at the box and threw himself into a threadbare armchair.

I had stopped pouring and drew myself up to my full height at his insult. "Sir! I am no peasant but am fulfilling my knighthood quest. I was sent to—" Then it occurred to me that I wasn't sure how I ought to deal with the old man. "Would you care to play tiddlywinks?"

The old man hooted. "Oh, ho, so that's what you're about! You've seen too many Midwinter pageants, young man. I don't play tiddlywinks. Maybe some former White Wizard did."

I was at a loss as to how to proceed. I didn't want to challenge the old man to combat, but as long as I was here, I ought to at least try to fulfill my quest. Perhaps he was susceptible to reason.

"Sir, I have been sent by the village of Half Day. Your storms are destroying their orchards."

"You—you—" the old man, pale with rage, was shaking a finger in my face. "You are a peasant! What do I care about your damned orchards?" He stood suddenly, nearly knocking me down, and stormed to the wall map. He tore the red ribbon from the map and re-tacked it around a smaller area farther to the south.

The landscape in the box seemed to flow together, then changed shape. I could clearly see a miniature version of Half Day, surrounded by sparkling trees. It was even more fairylike than I had remembered from a few days earlier. "It's beautiful," I said.

"Well . . ." The old man's expression softened. "Thank

you very much, I'm sure. Now get out!"

"Please," I said. "I can't go out in this storm. You don't realize, being the Lord of Winter, how hard it is on mere humans."

"Haw! Haw!" the old man laughed. "What do you suppose I'm made out of? Icicles? I'm as human as you."

"You are? I thought you were a—" I stopped myself.

"Don't tell me—a supernatural being," he said, wearily. "It's what I thought White Wizards were, myself, once."

"Excuse me." I realized then how little I knew of how Daglu chose to parcel out the powers he shared with others. "But if you're not a demon or an angel, how do you come by your powers?"

"They're the whim of the All-Giver," the old man said. "Given to me during a vision by some blazing apparition I've never seen since. I don't know what manner of creature it was, though I tend to favor the 'demon' explanation. No one else would show the utter lack of conscience that it did."

"Oh?" I was less interested in his explanation than I was in the fact that as long as he kept talking, he wouldn't throw me out.

"Yes," he said. "The clerics at the temple in Falias came to fetch me after staring at some fish guts or some such nonsense. They brought me to their temple, fed me a nasty liquid, and left me alone to be victimized by this demon, or angel, or whatever it was."

"It told me the job would be a true test of my artistry. It never bothered to tell me how despised I'd be. The Spring Child, Green King, Autumn Crone—they all receive acclaim for the beauty of their work. No one appreciates what I'm doing. Instead they curse me."

"Surely you suspected they'd act that way?" I said. "If you're human yourself, you know how hard winter is on people."

"I suppose." The old man nodded glumly. "But I thought if I did really beautiful work, I might work up to a different season. So last year and this, I've been creating masterpieces, if I do say so myself. I've even prayed, on the chance that the creature who appeared to me was actually Daglu. I asked it to consider the depth and breadth of my work, and think about giving me a chance with Autumn, at the very least. But I've heard nothing!"

"That's awful," I said. "Is there no way you can escape this slavery?"

"I could just leave. The being told me that the last White Wizard did," said the old man. "But at least here I'm cared for. By only one drunken servant, it's true . . . Did you know the Green King has an entire palace with courtiers and ladies and—"

"Shameful," I interrupted. I was not interested in the particulars of the old man's dissatisfaction. I was interested in the fact that I might fulfill my "knighthood quest" after all, if I played this situation skillfully. "As long as you have no prospects of improving your situation, why don't you have pity on the poor people who must suffer these winters?"

"You peasant!" The old man flung his favorite epithet at me again. "I have some pride in my work, after all. Should I abandon all my artistic integrity to make some ignorant fools happy?"

I'd had about enough of his ego, and was about to tell



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ISBN 1-56076-925-4 • Sugg. Retail \$4.95, CAN \$5.95, £4.99 U.K. • TSR #8357



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him what I thought of him, but I stopped myself in time. It would do no good to stoke his anger.

"You've always been an artist, haven't you?" I asked. "Even before the clerics found you. What did you do before you became the White Wizard?"

"I was a painter. Came up from nothing, too. Started out decorating the houses of well-to-do freemen, and then I worked up to doing murals in some of the finest buildings in the land. Do you know the Duke of Falias? I painted the mural in his Hall of Justice," the old man said.

I smiled to myself. I had finally figured out what the old man might respond to. "It's a shame no one appreciates your work. If people could only see—"

The old man interrupted. "They see it all the time. Their appreciation is so fulsome that they send would-be knights up here to try to pummel me into submission."

"No, they need to see your work in surroundings they can appreciate." That was a bit risky. After all, presumably the old man hadn't been able to resist the idea of having the whole world as his canvas. But I plunged on with my suggestion anyway. "You could find a place anywhere, with your talents. Why not leave this place and take a chance?"

"No thanks," the old man said. "I've seen how artists are treated, out in the larger world. I'd freeze in some garret."

"I'll see you don't freeze or starve." I tried not to think of how reckless I was to make the promise. "It's not much of a gamble. After being the White Wizard, you have gained abilities only dreamed of by those others who call themselves artists."

"It's true, my art has reached heights I never would have suspected in my youth," the old man mused. "Still, how much of that is due to the magical means at my disposal—my stage and my map?"

I tried to soothe him. "One's materials are only the smallest part of one's artistry, don't you think? After all, Daglu chose you, out of all the available artists, to become the White Wizard."

He swallowed it. "That's true."

"So you'll come with me?" I asked.

The old man sat lost in thought for several moments. Then a crafty expression came into his face. "Very well. I'll pack the sledge tonight and we'll leave at first light."

The return trip was far quicker than my bumbling journey north, partly because the old man knew where we were going and partly because the weather was much better. We arrived in only one—albeit very long—day of travel.

Unfortunately, our arrival in Half Day was not as triumphal as I'd hoped. Sir Gavin seemed, at first, ready to believe me—despite his unflattering surprise at my return. But it took Lady Elaine all of five minutes to convince him that I was lying.

"He's just a scrawny old man," she scoffed, pointing at the White Wizard. I saw that she had a point—he was old and scrawny. And away from his workshop, there was no way I could convince anyone of his powers.

"Say something," I said to him, hoping he'd know how to convince them. He shrugged, and left.

I was considering trying to catch up to him when Lady Elaine spoke. "Last year's harvest was the worst yet, and

next year's won't be half as good. We can't take in another mouth right now. Especially since you'll never get any work out of him."

"But, Elaine," Sir Gavin protested. "We can't turn him out, even if he isn't the White Wizard. The weather—"

"Hasn't been all that bad, the last few days," she said. "If he hurries, he can make it to Miles Cross. They may have more to spare."

"He can't hurry. He's an old man!" I clenched my fists to contain my anger. "He can stay in my mother's cottage and I'll work for both of us."

Sir Gavin looked up in surprise. "You said you'd never—"

"I made him a promise! I may only be your bastard, but my word is as good as yours." I looked at Lady Elaine, then back at him. "Perhaps better."

I stormed from the library and out the front door—a repeat of my dramatic exit from Half Day four days earlier—and fell flat on my backside. The flagstones were still coated with ice. I shook my head, which felt as if it were being stung with needles. It didn't help much. Then I realized I *was* being stung. The sleet had returned, more fiercely than ever.

I made my way to my mother's cottage. The sledge stood before it, where the old man and I had left it before presenting ourselves to Sir Gavin. I heard mumbling issuing from behind it. The old man was standing before the back of the wagon. He'd pulled back a canvas and was looking into a black box—the same one I'd seen in his workshop. And the map from his workshop was tacked up on the inside of the wagon.

"What are you doing? If Daglu or his priests find you with that—"

"No one ever said I had to stay in that godforsaken tower," he said. "I can be the White Wizard wherever I am."

"But you're ruining any chance you have of settling here," I said. "Why?"

"I told you I didn't like it here," he said, not at all contrite. "Even the nobles are peasants. You'd better find me something else or I'll bury this region so deep it'll take till August to dig it out."

"That's blackmail," I said.

The old man shrugged. "You'll think of something. You won't last long here anyway. Your father thinks you're a knight, and his wife thinks you're a villain, and as far as I can see, you're neither. Why don't you try to think of some place you'll find congenial? I imagine I'll be happy there as well."

"It's easy to see you've been out of touch," I said. "Every place is pretty much like another in Faland. I have my choice to remain here or go elsewhere, but the work will be the same. I'll have the honor of being a serf to some great or minor lord. I've already proved I'm no knight, no matter who my father is."

"He's not much of a knight either," the old man said.

"He's no monster-slayer, for which you should be grateful!" I retorted. "Otherwise, you and I wouldn't be having this conversation."

"Perhaps," said the old man. He sat in thoughtful silence for what seemed like minutes before he spoke again. "What about religious life? Clerics aren't wealthy, but they're comfortable enough, and they have more power

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even than the nobles, in some situations."

I shook my head. "I haven't the necessary piety, I'm afraid. Otherwise, I'd never have come to see you, legend or no."

"I thought you found me by accident."

"Well, yes, but I don't think I really believed in you. Otherwise, I'd have taken the whole quest a great deal more seriously."

"And been mightily disappointed." He was right, of course. He looked more like some peasant's demented grandfather than the White Wizard. He stroked his weedy beard. "If only you had a craft. You'd be welcome anywhere and be assured of a living."

"Please. Hunching over some cobbler's bench or sweating over a smithy would be my idea of hell."

"Surely you know how to do something!" He was clearly exasperated.

"Lady Elaine says the only thing I do well is lying. Not that there's any way a man can support himself by lying."

"I wouldn't say that." His eyes twinkled. "Until I built up a clientele, I had to do a bit of scrambling. Being quick with my hands—and my tongue—was a great help."

"How. . . quick?" I asked uneasily.

"Well, I lived in towns, of course. It was no large matter to pick up a bit of food or some paints or brushes when I wouldn't be able to pay for them until later."

"You were a thief? A con man?"

"Don't turn your nose up. Not as a vocation . . . just when necessary. And you will be, too, if you're not willing to work like a good peasant."

"I'd rather not be a thief. It's too much like being a

knight, taking things by force. Besides, the law's on the other side."

"Well, I give up! If you won't work or learn a trade, and you're not honest enough to take up thievery, there's no point in this discussion. The only thing you're fit for is to be an actor."

I stared at him. "Old man, you have just given me the answer."

"Don't be ridiculous. No one makes a living playing in the pageants."

"That's not entirely true," I said, thinking of Rosalinda's Players. During my time with Sir Bradagast, I couldn't help but notice that certain high-ranked lords chose to celebrate some of the major holidays several weeks early or late, so that they could have Rosalinda's Players provide the entertainment. Even the Duke of Falias had his Midwinter pageant early this year, I was told, so that Rosalinda could perform for him and still return to Bay Town in time to perform for her own patron.

My good deed in taking the White Wizard away from his tower was about to yield its rewards. I imagined Rosalinda regularly turned away discontented youths hoping to join her troupe. But those youths didn't have the White Wizard on their side. All I had to do was have the old man demonstrate for her how much more realistic her winter pageants could be, and she would be begging us to join her. And if that didn't work, I imagined the old man's penchant for extortion would serve us well.

"Come into my mother's house." I put my arm around the old man's shoulder. "Let me tell you how we can make a living as actors."

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#### STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

Title of Publication: DRAGON® Magazine

Publication No.: 0279-6848

Frequency of issue: Monthly

Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147

Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters of General Business Offices of the Publisher:

TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147

Publisher: TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147

Editor: Kim Mohan, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147

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Willard Martens, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147

Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None

#### Extent and Nature of Circulation

Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)

Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies Each Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
79,232	76,641
56,457	54,648
20,670	20,105
77,127	74,753
134	352
77,261	75,105
1,487	1,536
484	0
79,232	76,641

Paid and/or Requested Circulation

Sales through dealers and carriers

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Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation

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# Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (SASEs are being returned with writer's guidelines for the magazine).

This month, the sage examines a few spells, magical items, and psionic powers from the AD&D® 2nd Edition game and continues his look at the SPELLFIRE™ game.

**Recently, one of my players had his character cast the fourth-level wizard spell *polymorph self*. The character changed into a quickling and the player announced that the character could now move a rate of 96 and make three attacks each round. Is that correct?**

Not if you, the DM, don't think it is. A quickling's speed comes from its magically accelerated metabolism, and is not derived purely from its physical form; therefore, it can be considered a form of special movement, which *polymorph self* does not bestow (see the spell description, *PHB* page 161). While *polymorph self* bestows the assumed form's attack mode, a quickling's multiple attacks also stem from its incredible metabolism. A character who has assumed quickling form can use a quickling's attack modes (weapon attacks or unarmed combat), but only at the rate normally allowed to the character.

In general, the DM should look askance (consider special) at any nonflying movement rate of greater than 24 or flying movement rate of greater than 36. Likewise, the ability to attack more than once

each round with the same limb is a special ability and not a normal attack mode.

**Is it possible to use a *ring of shocking grasp* to give a metal weapon an electrical charge (by running a wire from the ring to the weapon) and inflict extra damage with the weapon?**

Although this trick has been used in at least one published adventure, there is no reason why the DM has to allow it. The ring's magic works when the character wearing it touches an opponent with the hand that the ring is on (the ring literally creates a magical joy-buzzer in the wearer's palm). Hitting an opponent with a weapon linked to the ring by a wire is not the same as touching the opponent with the hand wearing the ring. Remember that magic does not work according to scientific principles such as those that govern the flow of electricity from a charged object to grounded one.

**The psionic power Time/Space Anchor is supposed to prevent the user from being teleported against her will unless the opponent wins a psychic contest. How do you conduct a psychic contest if the opponent is not also a psionicist? Also, the way I read the Teleportation power, a psionicist can't teleport another character by force. What's up? Also, can Time/Space Anchor defeat the Banishment power? Can it prevent something from teleporting into an area?**

Conduct the psychic contest between the psionicist's Time/Space Anchor power score and the opponent's power score. If the opponent has no power score, use the opponent's Intelligence score instead. If the opponent is a magical device (such as a teleportation chamber) the DM must assign a value (12 is a good base value for

most devices).

You are correct that the power Teleport Other does not affect unwilling targets, but the Teleport power allows the psionicist to teleport other creatures within her grasp if she spends enough PSPs. If the creatures don't want to go, they can use Time/Space Anchor to stay behind. Time/Space Anchor works against Banishment and any other effect that is described as a teleportation, check the power, spell, or item description to be sure. Time/Space Anchor does not prevent teleportation into an area.

**Some of the half-dragons mentioned back in DRAGON® issue #206 (for the COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ setting) can have the dragon fear power. Is this the same as a full dragon's fear power? If so, how strong is it?**

Half-dragon fear is just like dragon fear except that it has a limited number of uses each day, as noted in issue #206. Otherwise, the power is based on the half-dragon's age category. The power's radius and strength is the same as the values given in COUNCIL OF WYRMS Book One, table 4, page 15.

**Over the years I've seen unique magical weapons and spell effects that are supposed to be treated as magical weapons for determining what types of creatures they can harm, but that have no actual bonuses. Does this mean that the items and spell effects in question are +0 weapons? I have never seen a creature that is effected only by +0 or better weapons. Are these weapons and spells effective against all creatures?**

Generally, an item that is equivalent to a magical weapon is treated as +1 even though it grants no bonuses. However, you

should check the item or spell description for exceptions; the flame blade spell, for example, is not treated as a magical weapon, but affects all forms of undead.

**Do spells such as *energy drain* from the PHB and *rift* (from the *Dragon Kings* book, page 110) affect mummies? I know that mummies are undead creatures, but they have a connection to the Positive Material Plane instead of the Negative Material Plane. How about psionic powers such as *Death Field* and *Life Draining*?**

Mummies are dead and cannot be drained of life energy (lose levels or hit dice) by any means.

**A frost brand sword has a 50% chance to extinguish any fire its blade is thrust into, but the ability has a 10' radius. Does this mean a character holding the sword can try to extinguish a flame just by getting within 10' of it? Does this mean that there is a chance that every candle, torch, and lantern within 10' of the sword will go out when this power is used? What happens if the sword is simply carried through a fire without being thrust into it?**

The item description (DMG, page 185) says the sword has a chance to extinguish any flame into which the blade is thrust. That leads me to suggest that the blade must at least touch a fire before it can be extinguished. The DM probably should require the wielder to deliberately stick the sword into a flame and activate the power, which is usable once a round.

The 10' radius defines exactly how big a fire the sword can quench at once. If there are a dozen small fires in the radius, only one can be extinguished each round. If the fire is bigger than a 10' radius it might spread right back into the area, depending on how combustible the material in the area is. I strongly suggest that you define an individual fire as one that has a fuel source not shared by any other fire. So, for example, a pile of seven logs burning in a fireplace counts as one fire, but seven candles all set in a row are seven different fires.

**How much weight can a pair of winged boots lift?**

I suggest 294 to 560 lbs. (280 + 1d20 × 14), just like *boots of levitation*.

## **SPELLFIRE™ game questions**

**How often is the defiler (#303) charged for casting spells?**

When the defiler uses spells in one round, a realm is razed or one holding is shuffled back into the draw pile, no matter how many spells she uses in that round. Every round she uses at least one spell one of the player's realms or holdings is affected.

**How long does the effect of Johy-dee's mask (#218) last? When can the holder choose a new power to copy?**

The mask works only during battles, and the effect lasts the entire battle. The mask's owner cannot choose a new power to copy between rounds. If the champion whose power is being copied is taken out of play for any reason the mask's owner can select a new power to copy even during a single battle. Discarded champions are not in play and the mask cannot copy their powers.

**At what point in a round is a rod of shapechange (#93) used?**

It is used just before a battle is declared. The player selects a discarded champion, then selects a realm to attack with that champion.

**What exactly does it mean when a card says the caster or user may ignore undead?**

When under the effects of this card, attacking or defending undead are totally negated—just as if they weren't in play. This would allow an attacker to raze a realm if only undead champions protected it. This also would allow a defender to be totally immune to the levels of an undead champion or the level-raising effects of undead allies.

**How is the permanent ally from the Grak's Pool holding (#243) supposed to work?**

Whenever a champion goes out to fight for the realm that Grak's Pool is attached to, that champion has a +5 ally attached to it. No matter how many rounds of battle go on, Grak's Pool automatically provides a +5 ally for each champion. However, if the attacker has an item, event, or spell that gets rid of allies the ally from Grak's Pool also is gone for that round.

**At what point is the card drawn to defend North Ledopolus (#229)?**

The card seems pretty clear to me. It says "One card can be drawn and played immediately in defense of the attached realm." When the attacker declares he is assaulting the realm attached to North Ledopolus, the defender draws a card. If it is a spell and the defender doesn't have a spell-casting champion, the card can still be used. If it is a card that can't be used in the battle, it goes in the player's hand.

**South Ledopolus (#230) can use any ally as a defending champion. How do you decide what kind of champion any particular ally is?**

If a card creates (or functions as) a champion but doesn't specify a type, it is always a hero.



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If a champion casts *animate dead* and loses the first round of battle and wins the second round is he then considered alive and normal like other champions?

Yes.

Is a champion in play because of *animate dead* considered undead?

No.

If *Lolth* (#166) is defeated, do her magical items and artifacts go into the draw pile with her?

No, they are discarded.

Exactly what bonuses are counted in determining a champion's level for purposes of spells and events that affect champions of a certain level or less?

All level-increasing cards count toward the champion's level at the time the spell is cast or the event takes place. For example, a level 5 champion with a +3 weapon and a +5 ally is a 13th level champion.

Can a feeble-minded (#385) cleric or wizard cast a dispel magic to negate the feeblemind?

Not in that the same round of battle that the feeblemind was cast. Note that the effect only lasts until the round ends, so there's no need to dispel it.

The cup of *Al'Akbar* (#160) can be used at the end of a player's turn. When does the turn "end" for purposes of using the card?

The cup is used during step five of the turn sequence. Remember, the updated rules (which were released in August) say that events may not be taken back from

the discard pile by any event or card's special ability.

I understand that the new photo cards have replaced 20 of the original cards. Which 20 cards have gone away?

The replacements are as follows:

**Original card**

- 143. Arms of Iuz
- 68. Cleric of Gond
- 179. Skulk
- 238. Waverly
- 85. Hubadai
- 182. Zadoc
- 168. Mutiny!
- 97. Flameblade
- 399. Ancient Curse
- 178. Seragrimm the Just
- 197. Magical Barding
- 191. Griffon
- 218. Johydee's Mask
- 239. Bodach
- 219. Helm of Teleportation
- 267. Chividal
- 326. Desert Warrior
- 339. Invisibility
- 345. Anti-Magic Shell
- 381. Phantasmal Killer

**Photo card**

- 401. Discovery of Spellfire
- 402. Magical Champion
- 403. Traitor
- 404. Chaos Shield
- 405. Slave Realm of Tunek
- 406. Phorbe's Scrolls
- 407. Mercenary Gold
- 408. Living Scroll
- 409. Ren's Bell of Death
- 410. The Labyrinth of Shuc
- 411. Annulus
- 412. Scroll of 7 Leagues
- 413. Map of Life
- 414. Supernatural Chill
- 415. Map to a Mercenary Army
- 416. Pit Trap!
- 417. Mind Flayer Lord
- 418. Aurak Draconian Lord
- 419. Chest of Many Things
- 420. Ego Coin

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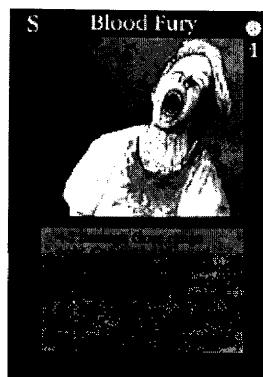
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# The Game Wizards

## Customizing your SPELLFIRE™ card decks

by Bruce Nesmith

I have a SPELLFIRE deck that currently is undefeated in one-on-one play. I am not so foolish as to say it is the best possible deck, just a darn good one. I would love to hear from anyone that thinks she has a better deck.

I have built 11 SPELLFIRE decks so far. Soon I will be building two or three more. My current SPELLFIRE decks incorporate the second edition photo cards (numbered 401-420) and the RAVENLOFT® SPELLFIRE cards. At the time I wrote this article, the DRAGONLANCE® and new FORGOTTEN REALMS® cards were not available. As soon as they are, I am sure I will have to rebuild my "undefeated" deck (which will most likely have been trounced by then). I would like to share with you my strategy for building this SPELLFIRE deck.

Currently I have decks built on the following themes: FORGOTTEN REALMS & monster cards, FORGOTTEN REALMS & wizard cards, GREYHAWK® monster cards, RAVENLOFT & ally cards, cleric, hero, and ally cards, wizard cards, DARK SUN® & ally cards, 20 cleric cards, flyer cards, and a "speed" deck of cards. A theme focuses the building on the task at hand. It also makes sure that there are no wasted efforts in his deck.

My speed deck currently is undefeated. It is tournament legal and works with the Rule of the Cosmos optional rule. The SPELLFIRE game is a building game that stresses defense. Therefore I focused this deck on defense and being able to lay out my realms faster than anyone else at the table. To do this, I decided that I would have the maximum number of realms (15) and use champions that worked best on defense.

Offensive spells, magical items, and even artifacts can be stopped by a wide variety of events, items, and champions. So I decided that I would have only defensive spells and no magical items, artifacts, or allies. Currently the only thing that can stop a defensive spell is the champion Midnight. It limited my choices considerably, but there was a method to my madness. I did have a moment of weakness. I decided to take a chance and put in one ally card, the Loup-Garou. The first time I used it, Jim Ward blew it out of the water

before it had settled on the table. Sigh.

For this particular deck, I picked realms that would allow a defending champion to cast wizard spells. I only found eight of them. To round out my realms cards, I chose The Great Kingdom and Myth Drannor, both of which increase a player's hand size. The Temple of Elemental Evil allows me to draw three cards immediately. Every deck must have a Menzoberranzan realm card. I took two! It can be played at any time, and is immune to flyers. Tyr can defend itself and lets the player draw an extra card each turn. Nibenay must be razed twice. There were others, all designed for defense and to give me more card options. To further increase defensive ability I included two Border Forts holdings, which prevent nonflyers from attacking.

Since I never intended to attack, I carefully choose my champions for their defensive abilities. I had a great deal of flexibility since my most of my realms would allow my champions to cast wizard spells. I looked for monsters that could cast wizard spells, such as Karm the Black Dragon and Strahd. Drizzt is mandatory for any deck. His ability to defend twice before being discarded makes him invaluable. I had to have Gib Htimsen in the deck just for the name (you figure it out). The other champions have powerful immunities or punishing special powers.

Events are always an important part of the deck. For this deck, I felt I must have two Caravan cards, a Cataclysm card, and a Labor of Legend card. The Caravans give me extra turns for speed, the Cataclysm destroys someone else's realm (no need for a messy attack), and the Labor of Legend allows me to rebuild a realm. Fast Talking! eliminates everyone's magical items and artifacts, and I don't have any!

It's not enough to build a good deck, you also have to play it well. The foremost rule for this deck is "Do Not Attack." Just have patience. If another player gets ahead, sit tight. Eventually a Caravan, Cataclysm, or Map of Life event card will come up. Then you will be in the lead. If the Map of Life is played at the end of your turn, the other players will be unable to play realms on their turns.

Lay down any realm except Menzoberranzan as your first realm. Since Menzoberranzan can be played at any time, it is a waste to make it the first realm played. However, if the Rule of the Cosmos is in effect, play Menzoberranzan as soon as it is drawn. Generally speaking, a realm that allows the defender to cast wizard spells should be the first.

In all one-on-one SPELLFIRE games, champions should be kept out of the pool as long as possible. Champions in the pool are vulnerable to events and other bad things. This deck has the potential to let a player keep 11 cards in his hand, which should help. If Rule of the Cosmos is in effect, play Midnight into the pool as soon as possible.

This deck does have some weaknesses. With so many wall spells in my deck (see below), a deck of flying champions would be hard to stop. There are hardly any cards in the deck that affect enemy allies. An ally heavy deck also would do well against my deck. I have beaten an ally deck simply by being faster. However, I have yet to face a flyers deck. I am sure that some day soon this deck will be beaten. When that happens maybe I will tinker with it to improve the card mix. Until then, I will take on all challengers!

### Bruce Nesmith's SPELLFIRE Speed Deck

**Realms:** Barovia, Tyr, Menzoberranzan (2), Evermeet, Invidia, Myth Drannor, Ravens Bluff, Nibenay, Thay, Waterdeep, Temple of Elemental Evil, Shadowdale, The Lands of Iuz, The Great Kingdom;

**Holdings:** Border Forts (2);

**Events:** The Caravan (2), Cataclysm!, Discovery of SPELLFIRE, Map of Life, Calm, Solid Fog, Labor of Legend, Good Fortune, Fast Talking!;

**Champions:** Karm the Black Dragon, Halcyon, Amarill, Strahd Von Zarovich, Fejyelsae, Drizzt Do'Urden, Gib Evets, Gib Htimsen, Alicia, Midnight Goddess of Magic;

**Wizard spells:** Wall of Stone (2), Wall of Iron (2), Wall of Force (2), Spell Turning (2), Blink (2), Rock to Mud (2), Dispel Magic (2), Enlarge, Shapechange (2);

**Allies:** Loup-Garou.

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# ROLE-PLAYING *Reviews*

©1994 by Allen Varney

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Photography by Charles Kohl

**Sleepers, awaken! Check out these MAGE \* game supplements**

You leave home to go to the game shop, or your friends house, or just down to the corner convenience store—your thoughts drift—suddenly you're *there*. Standing there blinking dully, you don't remember the journey or what you thought about. You traveled on automatic—asleep.

It happens to everyone. In fact, many philosophers through history, from Socrates and the Buddha 2,500 years ago down to George Gurdjieff and others in this century, say that we all spend our lives, apart from a few sublime moments, asleep. Moved by unexamined impulses, blind to our most obvious character flaws, unable to direct our thoughts for even a minute, we live on automatic.

Some people wake up. Intense concentration, powerful emotion, or faith transfigures these enlightened individuals. By all accounts they live self-determined lives, strong, aware, and unbound by convention. Sometimes their visions reshape society. Always the current power structure resists this change, for it has a vested interest in keeping its citizens asleep.

What could you do if you woke up? Folk and spiritual traditions in many cultures hold that you could perform magic.

In the gaming field, this idea finds its best expression in the 1993 entry in White Wolf's Storyteller series of RPGs, Stewart Wieck's *MAGE: THE ASCENSION*\* game. Forget character classes, apprenticeship, patron deities, wands, rings, and scrolls. In the *MAGE* game, you're a magician because you woke up. Your Awakened force of will, trained in one of the game's nine Traditions, can reshape subjective reality in ways that "Sleepers" can't. With sufficient rank in one or more of the nine Spheres of magic, like Forces, Correspondence, and Entropy, you can do almost anything. Too bad the mysterious Technocracy, whose Conventions control consensus reality, resists your efforts to lead the world to Ascension. Your cabal has to protect its Chantry, collect Quintessence and Tass, and watch out for Paradox spirits and the deadly insanity called Quiet.

You knew it's a White Wolf game just from all the capitalized words, right? The Stone Mountain, Ga., company has reshaped the field with its stylish, moody RPGs that emphasize a sort of sullen Generation X glamour. The other Storyteller games, *VAMPIRE*\* and *WEREWOLF*\*, have characters (and sometimes players) as much as saying, "I'm cooler than you 'cause I'm doomed." The ghostly stars of the latest Storyteller entry, the *WRAITH: THE OBLIVION*\* game, even have an Angst score; they do have a sense of humor down in Georgia. White Wolf's success has inspired many imitators, *VAMPIRE* players with a word processor, a dream, and enough money to print an RPG about tragic immortals who walk among humanity but must conceal their powers. These newcomers have spirit, and with time some will wake up and forge their own identities.

White Wolf itself, fiercely individual from the beginning, is not sticking to its

own stereotype. For 1996, principal designer Mark Rein-Hagen plans a new series of science-fiction RPGs called *Centennial*, which takes a guardedly optimistic approach quite different from the Storyteller series. The company's *STREET FIGHTER*\* game, a fine introductory RPG, also shows a more upbeat tone. And the *MAGE* support line, in contrast to its companion games, has established a genuinely positive role for its characters.

In White Wolf's contemporary "World of Darkness," vampires can aspire only to Golconda, a mystical freedom from the thirst for blood. Werewolves dread the looming environmental disaster called Apocalypse. Wraiths, who start out dead and get rapidly worse, may feel mixed fear and longing for Transcendence, which takes them out of the game. Unlike these gloomy types, mages fight for Ascension, enlightenment, for both the Awakened and Sleepers. They want to wake you up! Even the Technocracy aims at Ascension; in the recent support products, the bad guys appear not so much malign as dangerously misguided.

This marks a shift from the original *MAGE* game. Rick Swan, in his review in DRAGON® issue #202, observed that "the White Wolf crew must have worn out a thesaurus looking up synonyms for 'dreary' and 'desperate.'" The original game includes passages of optimism, but in general the mage player characters (PCs) are clearly outgunned. Dynamic but beset by enemies, they can win some battles but are losing the Ascension War. The moderation of this approach began when, right at the game's release at the 1993 GEN CON® Game Fair, White Wolf hired a new *MAGE* line editor. Phil Brucato, a writer and actor with extensive credits in the *WEREWOLF* game line, was probably the most harried man at the convention, because he had to round up a vagabond mob of designers for the upcoming year's *MAGE* products—after just three days on the job. Such a task would daunt even the Awakened, but Brucato did it, and his first half-dozen *MAGE* supplements play up a new tone, no less serious than the original but more compassionate and constructive.

"I've been here [at White Wolf] for a year," Brucato said in mid-September, 1994. "I figure that year is the first act, and so far the play is going very well." A decade of theater experience not only shows in his metaphors, it helps his design skills—"I learned to focus on who people are and what made them that way." He also listens carefully to player feedback: "An actor who doesn't pay attention to the audience won't be an actor very long." Brucato got a lot of feedback at this year's GEN CON Game Fair, where the *MAGE* game's popularity surprised and gratified him. The *MAGE* seminar drew more people and lasted longer than any other White Wolf seminar.

White Wolf fans already know about

this game's remarkable style, creativity, and highly original magic system. Gamers who bypassed the *MAGE* game, perhaps because the Storyteller line's overall grimness does not suit them, should check it out in light of the new supplements. But first, a few words of warning:

1. Like most White Wolf products, the *MAGE* game line aims for sophisticated, even controversial content. Some products include vulgar or profane language. Impressionable or easily offended gamers should look elsewhere.

2. The learning curve here rises steeply, not so much due to rules complexity (although the magic system calls for some study) as to the elaborate campaign background. Expect to grapple with somewhat esoteric concepts such as Paradox, Dynamic Essence, and Avatars. It may help to study the other Storyteller games and even the *ARS MAGICA*\* game (formerly published by White Wolf, now at Wizards of the Coast). Its "Mythic Europe" setting gives the historical antecedents of the *MAGE* game's Traditions. Would-be Storytellers should build up experience running other games before tackling this one.

3. The *MAGE* game system is fearsomely open-ended. If you can think of a spell, you can probably cast it. A player with the slightest tendency to abuse rules can wreck any story by Scene Two. But for role-players with mature sensitivity and self-control, this line offers enormous possibilities. Those with more interest in stories than in rules hacking should find these supplements, if not an Awakening experience, at least a lot of fun.

## The Book of Shadows

White Wolf

\$18

208-page softcover book

Writers: Emrey Barnes, Bill Bridges, Steve Brown, Phil Brucato, Brian Campbell, Sam Chupp, Beth Fisch, Don Frew, Dan Greenberg, William Hale, Harry Heckel, Sam Inabinet, Darren McKeeman, Judith A. McLaughlin, Jim Moore, Kevin Murphy, John R. Robey, Kathleen Ryan, Steve Wieck, Ehrik Winters, Teeuwyn Woodruff

Development: Phil Brucato

Cover photo: Larry Schnelli

Illustrations: James Crabtree, Scott Johnson, Matt Korteling, Robert MacNeill, Dan Smith, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Lawrence Allen Williams, Jeff Wright

If those listed aren't enough, *The Book of Shadows* credits six more writers with additional material, "I will never again try to coordinate 27 writers on one project," says developer Brucato, his eyes glazed in fearful recollection. Given its diverse origins, the *MAGE* game player's guide shows a wide variety of viewpoints, but remarkably consistent quality.

One could review this huge compendium of rules and background simply by listing on its contents—new character merits and flaws, new rotes (spells) and talismans,

insights into each of the Traditions and Conventions, rules for martial arts and familiars and "Certamen" duels, plus important clarifications of obscure concepts, all of it well illustrated and indexed—but as the late Richard Nixon used to say, that would be wrong. Those who produced *The Book of Shadows* made it much better than it had to be, and so in respect for their achievement, let's look more deeply at how the book treats campaign issues. This treatment shows how the MAGE game's original manner has become more positive in its supplements.

Like the VAMPIRE game's Clans, the Traditions represent a range of pop-culture archetypal images of magicians: shamanic, hermetic (scholarly), ecstatic, pagan; quasi-Christian mystics, quasi-Buddhist martial artists, Islamic assassins, and even mad scientists. Like the Clans and the WEREWOLF game's Tribes, the Traditions are quarrelsome and prone to feuds. "To the calmer mind, each Path assumes some function in the balance of creation. Most mages, however, are anything but calm. With enlightenment comes the certainty that each chosen road to Ascension is the only right one; with this certainty comes conflict" (page 10). This makes for good stories. Still, it hardly sounds positive yet. But compared to the images it details, *The Book of Shadows* shows a calmer, more tolerant mind.

Another comparison to the companion games is in order. The VAMPIRE game's Clans are cynical politicos who indulge the most lurid vices and manipulate the "Herd" (humanity) with casual contempt—who are themselves pawns in the unknowable plots of those ancient vampires, the Methusalehs. The Tribes of the WEREWOLF game breed doomed warriors who despise humankind's depredations of Gaia. I like and respect both these games, but their basic conflicts admit no solutions. After playing them, sometimes you feel such contempt for humanity, you want to wash. In contrast, *The Book of Shadows* shows forth the virtues of self-discipline and responsibility to Sleepers. All the Traditions share these, and even the Technocracy practices them, in its own misguided view. Newly Awakened mages, such as the PCs, bring new attitudes to old Tradition conflicts and introduce schism among the Conventions. Some of these mages strive not only for understanding (the perennial quest of the magician), but for *mutual* understanding. The World of Shadows remains a daunting landscape; nonetheless, this compassion is refreshing.

Beyond issues of tone, *The Book of Shadows* also saturates the reader with story. Nearly every section begins with a narrative, and much of the background material consists entirely of parables. "Better . . . to delve into concepts like Paradox or the Seeking in fables and read the lessons between the lines than to try to hammer them into dry text" (page 155). This healthy attitude stimulates the

imagination, induces a suitably magical frame of mind, and, in this case, proves enormously entertaining. (By excelling herself in these parables, one of those 27 writers gained roundabout credit for her work. Look in the index under "B" for "Beth Fisch's Kick-Ass Fiction.")

Unfortunately, all that great fiction is printed against gray-screened backgrounds in a variety of distracting patterns. It's amazing that this unsightly graphic concept has survived through many MAGE products. Someone also must like absurd numbers of epigraphs and doesn't seem to care much about editing errors. White Wolf staffers are only starting to pass disciple rank in the Sphere of Proofreading.

**Evaluation:** *The Book of Shadows* is essential to MAGE game players and Storytellers alike. Its imagination, intense commitment to story values, and subtle messages of tolerance make it a pleasure to read and a vital tool for understanding the game's complex campaign world.

### The Book of Chantries

White Wolf \$18

182-page softcover book

Writers: Steven C. Brown, Phil Brucato, and Robert Hatch

Cover: Scott Hampton

Illustrations: Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Larry MacDougall, Quinton Hoover, Drew Tucker, Lawrence Allen Williams, Craig Gelmore, Elliott, Andrew Robinson, Jeff Menges

After the MAGE game's release, White Wolf wisely gave priority to a book of home bases, or "Chantries," suitable for beginning cabals (player groups). Settings in *The Book of Chantries* range from new, weakly protected headquarters, which the PCs can run themselves—including (briefly) one mobile Chantry in a 1978 Volkswagen van—to ancient and powerful other-dimensional Chantries harboring huge numbers of mages—notably Doissestep, a sprawling, Gormenghast-ly realm where PCs become pawns in involved and self-destructive political infighting. Visit the lost City X in Peru, a Chicago mansion haunted by three murdered children, a Laughing Rock that gives you power when you tell it jokes, and—an unusual camp touch—Skultos Island, home of 90-foot apes. The supplement also offers Constructs (headquarters) of the Technocracy, as well as Labyrinths of the Nephandi, evil mages who consort with demons of the Deep Umbra.

The book also offers a Chantry construction-point system, modeled on the old headquarters rules from the I.C.E. Hero Games' CHAMPIONS\* role-playing game. Players can buy the assets and protection they like for their Chantry, although those on a budget must tolerate crucial weaknesses. This system fits well with the MAGE game design philosophy of customized character generation; in a

campaign any home base exists as an extension of the characters, albeit a vulnerable one. Wise Storytellers and players should regard the construction system in the same way as the character generation system, as a tool to increase player involvement in the campaign, develop scenic detail, and provoke story ideas.

*The Book of Chantries* offers more than a simple list of headquarters. Descriptions of many nonplayer characters (NPCs) who inhabit each sanctum, almost a roll call of the world's mages, amount to an outline of a complete campaign world with built-in conflicts, Tradition organizations, and recurring enemies. The supplement does a good if unexciting job covering all this, and many entries drop easily into an existing campaign. This is rare in a White Wolf product; a Storyteller who wants a quick backdrop for an adventure, a quick villain — *a quick anything* — can look in vain through most MAGE game supplements.

For instance, the brief scenario in this book, "Harvest Time," features a master villain who has shown up in WEREWOLF scenarios. He just popped up again in the recent adventure *The Chaos Factor*, technically a MAGE product but actually a crossover adventure for three Storyteller games. If your group isn't already well grounded in World of Darkness continuity, you might as well skip both these stories. White Wolf doesn't package freeze-dried story ingredients, but instead (to belabor the metaphor) mixes them in a flavorful stew. The Storyteller should proceed carefully, because digesting it all takes time, effort, and skill. (Skillful digestion? Sorry, the metaphor got away from me.)

**Noted in passing:** In addition to a home base, many campaigns need a hangout, a place to pick up missions and glean information. In *Digital Web* by Daniel Greenberg, Harry Heckel, and Darren McKeeman (reviewed by Rick Swan in DRAGON issue #211), the MAGE game offers a creative watering hole: the Spy's Demise, a haven in a virtual-reality universe that's "two microns wide and about three astronomical units long." Though marred by the lack of a good introductory scenario, *Digital Web* shows potent imagination. Its exciting slants on cyberpunk-style netrunning and settling the electronic frontier offer long-term campaign use. By the way, the Spy's Demise should look familiar to GEN CON Game Fair attendees who have visited Milwaukee's secret-agent theme bar called the Safe House.

**Evaluation:** *The Book of Chantries* and its Companion location book, *Digital Web*, provide important campaign resources for skilled Storytellers. The Chantries work not only as headquarters but as rich sources of NPCs and creative story ideas. *Digital Web* stands well on its own, whereas *Chantries* draws the PCs into the larger World of Darkness campaign setting.

## **Virtual Adepts**

White Wolf

70-page softcover book

Writers: Darren McKeeman and Harry Heckel

Cover: Michael W. Kaluta

Illustrations: Quinton Hoover, Scott Johnson, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Jeff Wright

\$10

## **Technocracy: Progenitors**

White Wolf

64-page softcover book

Writers: Edward Winters and Judith A. McLaughlin

Cover: Kevin Murphy

Illustrations: Dan Smith, Lawrence Allen Williams, Chris DiNardo, Eric Hotz, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook

\$10

## **Technocracy: Iteration X**

White Wolf

72-page softcover book

Writer: Chris Hind

Cover: Kevin Murphy

Illustrations: Mark Jackson, Lawrence Allen Williams, Scott Johnson

\$10

"The Virtual Adepts are the baddest damned thing to happen to this ball of dirt since lightning up and created amino acids. We've got the know-how, we've got the resources, and we've got the ELITENESS to bring every single mage out there to Ascension" (*Virtual Adepts*, page 8).

"The Conventions may control the world, but the Progenitors control the Conventions. We are integral to the functioning of the Technocracy as a whole, and we never let them forget that!" (*Technocracy: Progenitors*, page 28).

"Each of the other Conventions has a slightly altered—mistaken—concept of Ascension. They do things differently. Incorrectly. However, Iteration X has decided not to correct their faults as long as they contribute" (*Technocracy: Iteration X*, page 33).

Clearly, mages don't lack confidence. In the World of Darkness, confidence defines mages, for their Awakened viewpoint literally shapes reality. As *The Book of Shadows* puts it, "By my will, so is it done!" AU existence is subjective, consensual. In the MAGE game, science is not an alternative to magic; it is magic. "Since the time of Copernicus, a faction of mages that now calls itself the Technocracy has shaped human destiny on Earth. It has forged its magick of science into a huge body of knowledge accepted by most mortals purely on faith. Today is the age of science, and Technomancers are its high priests" (MAGE game book, page 33).

Consensus builders of the worst kind, Technomancers work in specialist sub-groups called Conventions, each devoted to a different advanced technology: the New World Order (Orwellian surveillance

and brainwashing), the Syndicate (money and power), and the Void Engineers (space exploration). Decades ago a renegade Convention, the inexpressibly cool Virtual Adepts, took their computers and defected to the good-guy Traditions. The first MAGE Tradition book deals with the Adepts. The first two Convention supplements cover, or make a stab at covering, the two most powerful and threatening Technocracy factions: Iteration X (cyborg guys) and the Progenitors (clone-drugs-genetics guys).

This early techie emphasis in the support line is somewhat unfortunate. Mages face not only the Technocracy, but also Nephandi, insane Marauders, Paradox spirits, and extra-dimensional Umbrood. However, this imbalance in coverage is temporary, because a massive supplement called *The Book of Madness* describes all these adversaries. It should be out by the time this review sees print.

*Virtual Adepts* describes the youngest, most cocksure, and least liked Tradition, the masters of computer magic. Starting with a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) file for new Adepts, it moves to a lengthy documentary history featuring Adepts Charles Babbage and Alan Turing. Background on the current Adepts, written as by a Verbena infiltrator, includes vague data on the Hacker's Code of Ethics, cypherpunks, dream hacking, and literal flame wars of a kind you've never seen on the Internet. Much space given to a rundown of the Adepts' troubled relations with other Traditions (Chapter 3.0, "Does Not Work Well With Others") might have been better devoted to more computers, NPCs, and hard data to supplement the skimpy Appendix; what's a hacker without equipment? The treasure of the book is a set of six very creative PC archetypes like the Revisionist Writer, the Mad Simulator, and the Couch Potato, who can send his personal icon on adventures without ever leaving home. There's not a pocket protector or a can of Jolt in sight.

Both Technocracy books begin with a lengthy first-person accounts by a new Convention recruit, then give half the book to Storyteller information, new spells and equipment, NPCs, and Constructs (Chantries). The insider narratives entertainingly present their Convention's psychology and views of its own history, goals, and adversaries. The true information here is often less intriguing than the falsehoods the Convention believes. For instance, Iteration X says werewolves can't change form in cities. *Oops!*

There's not much to complain about in these two books, as far as they go. Of the two, *Iteration X* shows more pizazz in its suitably Kafkaesque assembly/disassembly-line factory Construct, creepy biomechanoid warriors, spells like Statistical Mechanics and Perpetual Motion, and insight into the pathos of its cyborg warriors. Few player groups would fear a monster called a Cyber-Tooth Tiger (yes, really), but mages will sweat through their

fashionable leather jackets if they face the experimental HIT Mark VI Nanotech Assemblage. I really wanted to see a lengthy description of Autochthonia, Iteration X's machine world on the far side of the Sun, but this book fills its 72 pages pretty well.

*Progenitors* makes a drier read. Its insider narrative consists mainly of lecture notes, the spells have names like Simulate Inborn Errors of Metabolism, and the drug section gives little magic and much about mundane drugs such as steroids. The Construct laboratory, like most of the book, is adequate but blah. The Progenitors breed horrific monsters, we're told, but the supplement gives us only giant squids, lizard men, and dracosaurs. Oh yes, we also get Emmanuel, a bat-winged Chihuahua, and Pander, a cat with a frog's tongue. Mages, you're in trouble now.

To my mind, both Technocracy books lack sufficient campaign advice. You can glean quite a bit from the narratives, and with this a Storyteller who prefers improvisation over explicit plots can go far. Editor Brucato favors this style of play himself and speaks fondly of pick-up games he has run entirely off the cuff. I prefer hard details on how to introduce these Conventions into the campaign, kinds of stories they're best for, and likely campaign developments—continuing rivalries, festering hatreds, running gags. Actually, the idea of running gags in a White Wolf product makes my head spin, but given the extreme emphasis on storytelling in the original MAGE game, these books could have discussed story values more clearly.

**Evaluation:** *Virtual Adepts* should appeal to players of Adept characters, and for other Traditions its background may enhance adventures in the Digital Web. The *Technocracy* books, *Iteration X* and *Progenitors*, seem more useful to Storytellers. If you need a bad-guy book, both serve essentially the same function. Unless you plan a long story line about genetics and clones, go with *Iteration X*.

**Support plans:** The MAGE game line thrives. Brucato has tentatively scheduled it through 1997. The next Tradition books cover the Verbena (pagans), Sons of Ether (mad, they called us *mad*, hahaha!), and my favorite bunch, the monastic martial artists of the Akashic Brotherhood. After *The Book of Madness* mentioned above, the new year brings *Ascension's Right Hand* (a book of friends and Acolytes) and *Technocracy: New World Order*. Later in the year comes a "mean streets" sourcebook, *Destiny's Price*, by Steven Long, the talented author of *Dark Champions* and other CHAMPIONS game supplements. If your mages are a roving lot, look for *Beyond the Barrier*, a sourcebook of the Deep Umbra and other planets. And a four-part MAGE comic strip has begun in *White Wolf* magazine.

Brucato sounds most excited about June's *Fragile Path*, a MAGE book of art and fiction without gaming material. This collection of

five ancient "memoirs" delves into the history of the Traditions. History plays a big part in the Tradition and Convention books, too. Brucato says this aids suspension of disbelief, adds color and depth, and most importantly, develops a mythic element in the MAGE game line. John Robey wrote in *The Book of Shadows*, "The Storyteller Games have all been written with an eye toward the Mono-myth [the archetypal hero myth], but [the MAGE game] provides the most hope of breaking through the darkness and getting to the light beyond? *Fragile Path* apparently takes a large step in that direction.

The upcoming year sounds interesting for the Awakened. Don't get caught napping.

## Short & sweet

*Loom of Fate* by Chris Hind (White Wolf, \$10).

This first full-length MAGE game scenario continues the rule books introductory adventure, staging alarming disruptions in San Francisco's magical Pattern, woven by an Umbrood Pattern Spider. Such is this game's ideology that if you mess over the city's Pattern, you get earthquakes. I wonder if that works in Topeka or Winnipeg? The mages face cycle-gang demons, mutant alligators, a ghost (in a subplot as immaterial as the spirit itself), and hordes of Technocracy stooges. But are the PCs acting of their own will, or does Fate dictate their moves?

You'll like *Loom's* fluid and various plot, the atmospheric Umbra of San Francisco, the weird NPCs, and the appendix that describes a mage-inspired Tarot Arcana. (The title page of each new MAGE\* supplement adds one such card to a growing layout. The import of this intriguing motif remains unknown.) But pray that your players achieve victory, because if they don't, the fail-safe option that rescues San Francisco is totally bogus. Given that this is the only full-length MAGE adventure to date, I wish *Loom of Fate* offered more obvious chances to kick off an ongoing chronicle, but as it stands—alone—it gives good value. Even if you don't play the MAGE game, check out the inventive collage cover by Henry Gordon Higginbotham.

**The magazine scene:** Starting an independent gaming magazine is less risky than playing the state lottery, but not much. In surprising and happy news, several new magazines have passed safely (so far) through fields littered with entrants and have begun to prosper.

*Shadis Magazine*, greatly improved in recent issues, deserves an admiring look for its articles on small-press RPGs and fanzines, play-by-mail, and the game use of TV series like *Briscoe County, Jr* and *The X-Files*. The new "Game Master's Workshop" section discharges tiny adventure ideas and NPC descriptions like random sparks from a bonfire. Check out the regular strip "Joe Genero," which amusingly describes the abilities of the generic

baseline human in many game systems. (The average man's top running speed in the CALL OF CTHULHU\* game is 1.63 mph. That helps explain the CoC game's high fatality rate!) Review quality in *Shadis* seldom rises much above "This is good," production is unassuming, and the art is amateur, but this enthusiastic magazine certainly does offer a lot for the money. The issue at hand (#14) has 112 pages! (Subscriptions \$21/6 issues, Canada \$35, overseas \$50, Alderac Entertainment Group, 17880 Graystone Avenue #203, Chino Hills CA 91709.)

*Cryptch* magazine is a fascinating mess—a lunar mountain range of articles, starkly uneven, weirdly arresting. Buoyed by good coverage of WotC's sensational MAGIC: THE GATHERING\* card game, *Cryptch* has achieved success without having to decide what it should be. So in one issue (#6) we get scenarios, Usenet primers, movie news, interviews with William Gibson and futurists Jaron Lanier and Frank Ogden, notes on international gaming, numerology, shamanism, et cetera and so forth. Every piece looks completely different from every other, and typefaces? *Cryptch* has more typefaces than you even knew existed. Reviews range from fiercely intelligent to "This is good," and the one- to six-page newsletters from many game companies are similarly irregular. Anyone can find *something* worthwhile in this magazine, and it will certainly find a focus over time, but for now I find this brilliant hodgepodge quite cr—uh, baffling. (Subscriptions \$14.95/6 issues, Canada \$22.95, ILM International Inc., 30617 U.S. Hwy. 19 North, Suite 700, Palm Harbor FL 34684. Florida residents add local sales tax.)

The same folks have just started *Scrye* magazine for collectors of trading card games such as the MAGIC game. No strategy tips here, but collectors (as opposed to gamers) will prize the card lists, price guides, retailer reports from across the country, and articles like "How to Run an Auction on the Internet." Not a collector myself, I still like *Scrye's* previews of and rules from new card games, design notes, and designer interviews. (Subscriptions \$19/6 issues, Canada n/a, from the ILM address for *Cryptch* above.)

Lester Smith reviewed *Amberzine* from Phage Press in DRAGON issue #209, but I want to single out #5 (November 1993, \$10), which reprints the complete text of *The Dark World*, a long-forgotten 1946 fantasy novel by Henry Kuttner (though evidently it was actually written by Kuttner's wife and collaborator, C. L. Moore). With an introduction by Roger Zelazny and Ray Bradbury's memoir "Henry Kuttner: A Neglected Master," *Amberzine* #5 makes a nice addition to any Kuttner fan's book collection. *Amberzine* itself, nominally supporting Erick Wujcik's AMBER DICELESS ROLE-PLAYING\* system, has become almost entirely game-free, much like the RPG, and now serves more as a

good but pricey general 'zine for Amber fans.

After eight years and substantial upgrades in paper stock, color, and (recently) proofreading, *White Wolf* magazine remains a sad case. Its reviews read better, and anyone who devotes seven full-color pages to a scenario for stuffed animals (using Inner City's FUZZY HEROES\* game; issue #46) deserves attention—maybe medical attention, but I liked it. However, *White Wolf's* content remains starkly uneven, the comic strip "Gladiator Cow" is embarrassingly poor, and, incredibly, the editor obtrudes italicized comments in the articles, little bracketed rimshots that show off his cleverness. *[Editor's Note: Don't you just hate editors who do that? —Dale]* He must be a riot in high-school home room. (Subscriptions \$28/12 issues, Canada \$38, overseas surface \$58, White Wolf Game Studio, 4598 Stonegate Ind. Blvd., Stone Mountain GA 30083.)

My favorite gaming magazine is *Pyramid* from Steve Jackson Games. Edited by Scott Haring (*Autoduel Quarterly* and the late, lamented *Gamer*) and the gifted Derek Pearcy, *Pyramid* is a slick and colorful compendium of reviews, articles, and news in the tradition of the old SJG incarnation of *Space Gamer*. It's thin for the price, but tightly focused articles, excellent reviews, attractive layouts, and a sharp sense of humor make *Pyramid* a pleasure to read. (Subscriptions \$23.70/6 issues, Canada and Mexico \$29.70 overseas \$41.70, Steve Jackson Games, Box 18957, Austin TX 78760-8957.)

*Double Exposure* by Fraser Cain with Nigel D. Findley (FASA, \$10).

The title of this suspenseful SHADOWRUN\* adventure has nothing to do with photography. Rather, the shadowrunners must expose two organizations involved in Project Hope, a charity that uses the homeless to restore Seattle's devastated Barrens. In the SHADOWRUN game, you know that anything called Project Hope has to be bad news, and the runners' infiltration leads from low-key detective work to gooey horror. Some scenes don't make a lot of sense, but they sure are creepy! The tricky free-form story line may prove fragile if the PCs try gung-ho tactics, so the GM should do some prep work to invent safeguards beforehand. *Double Exposure* is an inventive and off-beat SHADOWRUN adventure in its own right, and it lays the groundwork for a dramatic change in the campaign world. Look for the upcoming *Bug City*, and prepare to be astonished.

*Allies* by Scott K. Jamison and others (Hero Games, \$13).

Unless your PCs are the only superheroes in your four-color comic-book world, this long-needed CHAMPIONS\* game supplement can flesh out your campaign with 50 super-powered NPC heroes, vigilantes, entrepreneurs, and wannabes.

The seven teams in *Allies* fill various roles: rivals (the government-sponsored Executive Sanction), harbor for reformed supervillains (the Redeemed), scene stealers (named the Flashmen), brutal hunters (the Posse), and light comedy (a super-strong circus and wrestling show called the Braverman Foundation). Jamison's fondness for Japanese anime shows in the Zen Team, a corporate-sponsored group with built-in soap-opera angst of the animated variety. Eight more solo characters offer much interest, such as the racist Aryan, who does good deeds to promote his reprehensible cause; Little Angel, an eight-year-old with a magic wand; and my favorite, Interference. Interference is a clueless schlemiel with incredible good luck and incredible bad luck—he just stumbles onto the scene and waits for the villains to defeat themselves.

The characters in *Allies* show faults common in the CHAMPIONS line: widely varying power levels, no proofreading, and that recurrent annoyance, the meaningless Psychological Limitation ("Strong regard for life"; "No sense of humor"). Nonetheless, these folks work well as backup, rivals, one-shot PCs for new players, and sometimes as ambiguous villains. *Allies* belongs with *Classic Enemies*, *Normals Unbound*, and *Classic Organizations*, the vital toolkits for any four-color CHAMPIONS campaign.

Incidentally, on-line fans of the CHAMPIONS and HERO SYSTEM\* games should be aware that the semi-official Hero BBS, Red October, recently split off a new node. In addition to the longtime Austin, Tex., number, now known as "RO Bravo" (512-834-2548, 14.4K and lower speeds), this free 24-hour BBS now occupies a second system in Sunnyvale, Calif., called "Alpha" (408-735-0481, 28.8K and lower). The two systems mirror each others' messages twice a day. Red October continues to offer amazingly active discussions on many aspects of the CHAMPIONS game, as well as free downloads of campaign chronicles, playtest manuscripts, and other tiles. Many Hero designers call regularly.

GOOTMU\* board game by Tom Jolly (Jolly Games, 3236 Peacock Lane, Santa Maria CA 93455, \$15).

The designer of the blast-and-a-half WIZ-WAR\* board game followed up in 1992 with this equally unusual game of great maze escapes. The board is made new each game using nine to 20 4 x 4-space geomorphic tiles, all printed with walls, locked doors, and—the heart of the game—many spaces printed with bizarre effects: "Rotate this tile clockwise 1/4 turn," "Next player you touch goes home," teleportation, extra turns, and penalties. Two to six players wander this maze looking for the three pieces of their own GOOTMU, their Get Out Of The Maze Unit. Much as in the WIZ-WAR game, the concatenation of bizarre effects makes the game. However, the GOOTMU game plays as more of a puzzle, where you plot each move

to take maximum advantage of all those weird spaces. If one game happens to get a good group of tiles from the 32 provided, you'll have lots of freewheeling fun. But you might just as easily get a frustrating maze full of dead ends and obstacles. The GOOTMU game is an interesting but uneven design, where each game becomes a roll of the dice in more ways than one. It's worth a try, but I recommend sticking with the terrific WIZ-WAR game.

*Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net* by Edward Bolme, David Ackerman, Derek Quintanar, Steve Sabram, and others (R. Talsorian Games, Inc., \$12).

Breathe deep, grab your armrests, and get set for another brain-blast from the folks who brought you the landmark *Night City Sourcebook* supplement for the CYBERPUNK 2020\* RPG. In this more-than-usually terrific supplement for the same game, legendary netrunner Rache Bartmoss takes you on a gonzo tour of the worldwide virtual-reality cyberspace network of 2020.

Rache, Rache—what can I say? The ultimate netrunner, the first person to live entirely on-line, the anarchistic nemesis of authoritarian Netwatch pinheads worldwide. Though Rache is currently sort of, well, dead, his cryogenically frozen brain has dictated

this lengthy memoir of his full-tilt runs from Chiba through Pacifica and the Rustbelt to Eurotheatre and Sovspace, and then upward to Orbitsville and beyond. Fueled by adrenaline, cyberware, a passion for freedom of information, and (how to put it delicately?) raving insanity, he writes with panache, paranoia, and jovial sociopathy.

*Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net* offers a stunning and successful example of a quality rare in game writing, voice. Eight talented writers give us a tour not only of the net, but of a deranged and pleasantly garrulous personality:

"Las Vegas is a post-modern crucifix for the soul, a neon electric chair where your spirit can roast in the darkness, basking like a fly in a bug light until every last vestige of consciousness is burned out of your system and reformed by plasticworkers (hanging by their heels in a hotel room out of town) into a mockery of innocence, which is one thing you'll never find here. The Las Vegas net draws in tourists like a black hole draws in light, bending them and pulling them and redshifting them until they vanish across the event horizon with a gasp that is at once orgasmic and terrified, and all

you find later is a shriveled husk abandoned by the satiated mantises in the wastelands, bereft of money and life and will . . . I get more tense moving through these cities than I did when I tested my latest Skullcap program upgrade against a Brainwipe program and it crashed, leaving me with nothing but a text editor to defend myself."

Or this, about the Shell Traders on the Pacific Island of Kiribati, who copy bootleg software to disk and pitch it by phone:

"It just cracks me up to think of all this hardcore electronic data haggling being done by slabs of gristle flopping like a brain-shot nomad inside the wet infectious cave of corporate mouths!"

It's like that all the way through. See the Disney data fortress in Tokyo (shaped like a giant Mickey Mouse). Learn how to reprogram the Talking Lincoln Memorial Data Fort in Washington. Meet rogue Artificial Intelligences, which may or may not actually exist. Read about Rache's encounters with other dimensions, alternate time lines, and alien beings.

Above all, learn how to make the net an exciting and endlessly various place in CYBERPUNK adventures. Sidebar "hyper-text" expansions of highlighted text add game value to Rache's stream-of-consciousness musings. Datamaps of many major cities aid in running globetrotting scenarios. A rules appendix clarifies game concepts, offers systems for hacking cyberware and other "micronets," and describes new equipment and NPCs. Typos proliferate, but the layout matches R. Talsorian's high standards, and the color computer graphics are breathtaking.

This *Guide to the Net* makes a constructive contrast to another guide to the net, the *Virtual Realities* supplement for FASA's SHADOWRUN game. Half of FASA's book goes to rules, dry and complex as a software manual. Its fiction and images help describe the experience of running the SHADOWRUN Matrix, but it gives no sense of locality, of geography. One spot in FASA's Matrix seems much like another.

This Talsorian guide, on the other hand, makes cyberspace a colorful, kitschy place. Afrikani netrunners use tribal mask icons, and maintenance programs in Pacifica look like dolphins. Some of it seems too obvious, much of it implausible, but almost all of it sounds fun. Put on your 'trodies and

jack in for a grand tour of the on-line world. And remember: Information wants to be free.

*Freelancer Allen Varney has been published by TSR, FASA, West End Games, Hero Games, Steve Jackson Games, Tor Books, and others. He is writing an EARTHDAWN\* novel for FASA/Roc for publication in 1996, and Wizards of the Coast plans to publish his expansion set for the MAGIC: THE GATHERING card game, introducing wizards and familiars, some time before the next geological epoch.*

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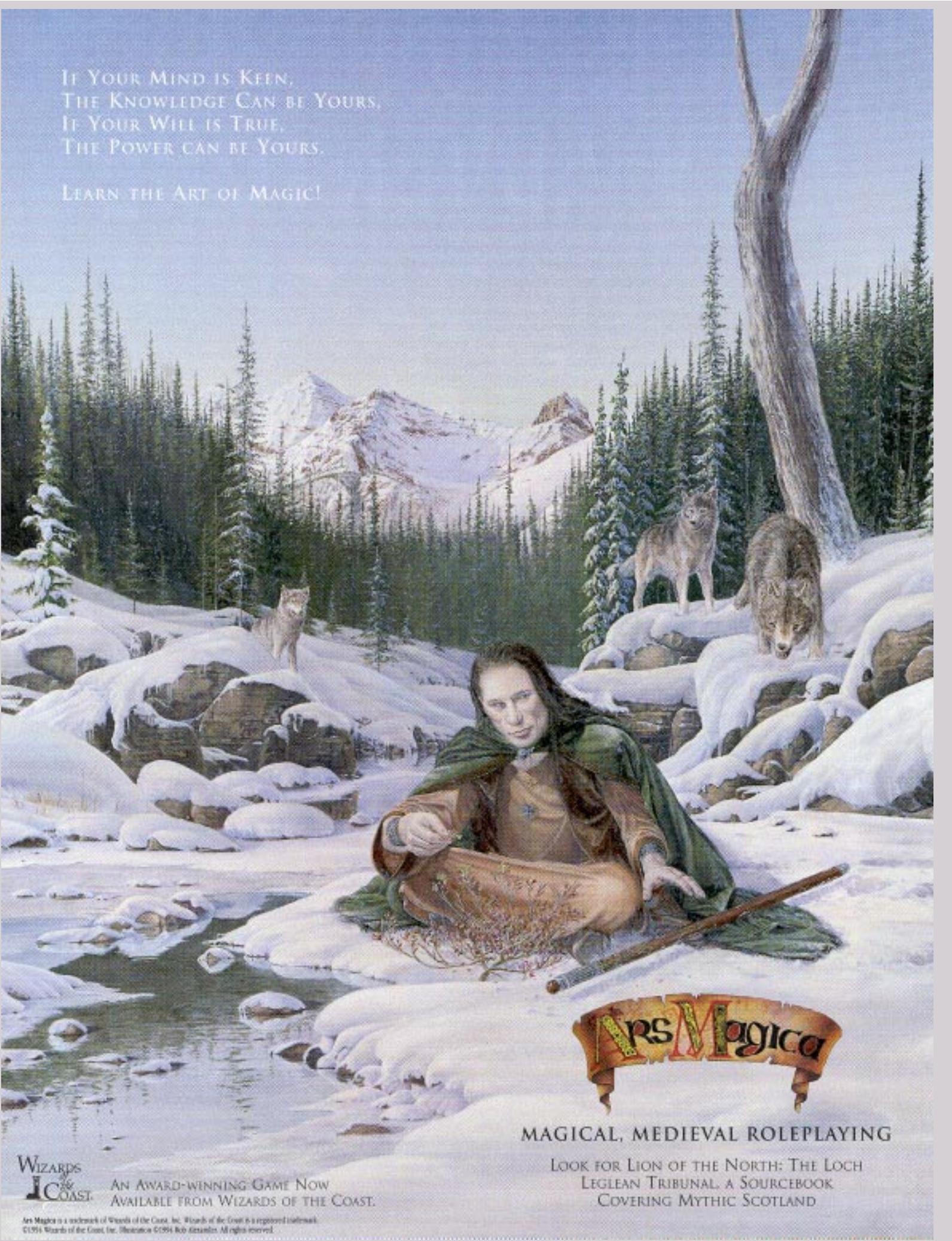
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# Forum

*"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments. You must give us your name and full mailing address if you expect your letter to be printed (we will not consider a letter submitted anonymously), but we will not print your name if you ask us not to do so. We will print your complete address if you request it.*

Concerning the article, "The Legends Say . . ." in DRAGON issue #202, the whole emphasis of the series of articles in that issue about thieves and bards was to inspire the cunning and craftiness that these two character classes need to survive. Your article seems to try to shift the responsibility of the bard to the Dungeon Master. Bards are very special player characters and therefore are rarely found in parties of adventurers. One who plays a bard should know right off what is required, that is to be glib of tongue and quick of thought. I have found that a good DM will have all the necessary information for special magical items, but in regular circumstances the history of an item should be improvised by the bard. Through the tale the bard is sure to mention things that later he will regret, for a good DM will pick out a great subplot from some part of the lavish tale. This usually means trouble, but it also creates some fun for the DM as well.

If a DM is going to sit down and write all the descriptions for every magical item he wishes to use in the game, he might as well sit down and write poems and songs that inspire other party members into battle.

Gregory Johns  
21495-086 N/A  
P.O. Box 7007  
Marianna FL 32447-7007

After reading the letter by Andrew M. Curtis ("Too many youngsters?" in DRAGON® issue #200), I felt I had to respond. Mr. Cur-

tis complains about the young gamers causing problems during play. Well, do you not realize that if you are 20 years old, and have been playing for 10 years (see where this is going?), you started playing at the age of 10. Now, take another look at the girls' ages (11 and 12). They are one to two years *older* than you were when you started playing. If they are causing problems *now*, what were you like in 1983? We who enjoy this game must learn to play it a.) somewhere, b.) somehow, c.) *sometime*. When we do not have the patience to take the time and instruct young ones about the rules, concepts, and what the game "reality" is, we stop gaining new players, viewpoints, and ideas. Don't kill the game because of their (or your) immaturity. Remember, this will be the next generation of gamers, women and men. If anyone (men or women) would like to respond to what this old (23) gamer has to say, please feel free to write me directly. I am open-minded and will respond objectively.

Jim Looper  
23 Spring St.  
Williamston SC 29697

This is in response to Andres Zornosa's Forum letter in issue #200 asking for ideas on how to "revive the excitement of playing the AD&D game."

Any role-playing game, whether it's the AD&D® game, FASA's MECHWARRIOR® or SHADOWRUN® games, Palladium's RIFTS® game, or whatever, does not automatically contain more excitement in and of itself than any other system. The excitement comes from how the players and the referee play the game. Somebody who doesn't like fantasy settings is not going to enjoy playing the AD&D game, for example. Also, different people have different feelings on different aspects of systems, such as whether class-based or skill-based characters are better, which will affect what systems they like.

Now, in the case of the people referred to in the letter, it would seem that they have a strong preference for science-fiction settings (I can't comment on the mechanics of the systems, having never played them). It also strikes me as highly unlikely that they haven't played the AD&D system, so it's unlikely you'll be able to convert them. As for what you can do, a couple of possibilities spring to mind:

1. You could try playing one of the systems popular in your area, if you haven't

already. You never know, you might like them.

2. If a local gaming or comic shop will let you, put up a message to find people interested in playing the AD&D game.

Kevin Lighton  
New Brunswick NJ

The RAVENLOFT® gothic horror setting for the AD&D game was long overdue. So many creatures were completely out of their element without it. The game system provided many excellent concepts, adding flavor and suspense. No longer is a DM reliant on an arsenal of magic or overwhelming numbers to challenge PCs. The concepts of fear and horror checks add realism that would otherwise be ignored. The flexibility of the Demi-plane also is very useful, as characters are absorbed into the mists. The array of creatures and modules developed for the RAVENLOFT setting is praiseworthy. There are, however, a few minor changes I made to suit my campaign.

One problem I ran into is the physical restraints of the Demi-plane. You get in but can't get out. Each land is dominated by an evil Lord, who can sense every move. The problem is that there is no haven for good, no place for the characters to get attached to and make their home. By denying them this, you lose an important option. Once PCs invest time and money into a castle or a church, they will go to great lengths to defend it. As nomads, they may soon lose interest in the next cursed village. Another problem to consider is this: what if a DM has created a world for the PCs, but wants to mix in the gothic horror element?

My campaign is set in a world I created, very similar to northern Europe, but any land would do. I then created a city, shrouded in mystery. It is a place of many wonders as well as dark crimes (modern New York City). It is this city which acts as the hub of the campaign, as it is also a link to the RAVENLOFT realms. Yet, the city is also an exit. Depending on my designs, PCs may find their way back to the city at the end of an adventure or in another realm. To detail the city, I have drawn strongly on the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting's city of Waterdeep layout, as it is beautifully done. Just take away some of the magic to allow for more mystery. In and around this city, the characters can build their castles,

homes, and churches. Yet time after time they will suddenly find themselves lost in the mists. By establishing them so well in the city, they are reluctant to leave, and are continual bait for your adventures.

When they are drawn into the RAVENLOFT setting, I ignore the physical layout presented. They end up where I want them and when they travel, the same holds true. Also, mentioning the plane by name as well as its characteristics diminishes its mystery. I keep my PCs in the dark as to why they keep getting lost and how they manage to get out.

All in all, the RAVENLOFT setting is an invaluable addition to the AD&D game. My fullest compliments to all those who have helped design it and those who continue to do so.

Mike Delmonico  
Albuquerque NM

I am writing to offer a suggestion to those DMs beset by players who want to play evil PCs.

It all started part of the way through an epic quest that took my good-aligned PCs through many strange lands, battling foes that threatened to banish all beauty and light from the land, blah, blah, blah. I noticed a certain amount of unrest amongst my players, who just didn't seem too motivated by altruism and just plain good-deed-doing. The paladin kept saying things such as, "I disgorge the demon's

liver and slow-roast it on my flame *tongue* sword, and serve it up to the party with some fava beans and a nice Chianti." And I'd say, "Really?" And he's say, "No, just kidding. I say something suitably heroic, like 'Get thee hence back to the Abyss from whence you came, foul brute . . . or something.' " The boredom was hanging mighty thick in the air that night.

The next week we convened as usual and I began the session with my introduction. "The heroes are bivouacked on a hill, overlooking the armies of Good. A short distance away, too close for comfort, swarm the hated forces of Evil. But we're not going to worry about that tonight. Tonight, you're going to play monstrous humanoids, and I'm going to allow you to sack and pillage a small town. You can do whatever you want—let your little chaotic evil hearts run wild."

There was a chorus of cheers.

So on that night the "player characters" went wild, slaughtering, burning, and devouring the hapless denizens of a pastoral village.

Having thus sated the players' lust for blood, we finished up the "epic quest" in the next two gaming sessions, and of course the PCs triumphed, saving the world from the horrors of darkness and eternal damnation. They returned home . . . to find their village completely razed, their strongholds mere piles of masonry, their families either hideously murdered

or missing, their treasures empty. It seems that a horde of particularly vicious humanoids had attacked while the heroes were away saving the universe.

The barbarian PC is now insane, the result of having gazed upon the remains of his invalid father (an exiled king), who had been drawn and quartered.

The mage's spell books are nowhere to be found, and one of his travelling books had been destroyed in the aforementioned epic quest. He has seven spells left.

The priest is in very deep trouble with his deity. Unless he recovers a very valuable statue, he's going to have trouble receiving those high-level spells.

The other PCs lost wives, children, and strongholds, as well as pretty much their entire net worth. So now I have a group of players who are incredibly galvanized in completing a new quest. Their characters must undo all of the damage that the "temporary evil PCs" (clad in smelly, furry, pustule-covered skin) wrought!

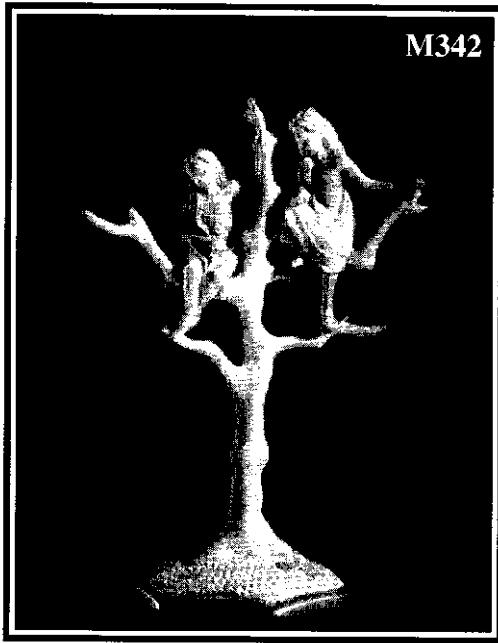
Anyway, the long and short of it is that no one has mentioned playing an evil character since, and I don't anticipate it happening for quite some time (if ever). So if your players think they have got to play evil beings, go ahead and let them. But make it count.

Robert Griffin  
Reno NV  
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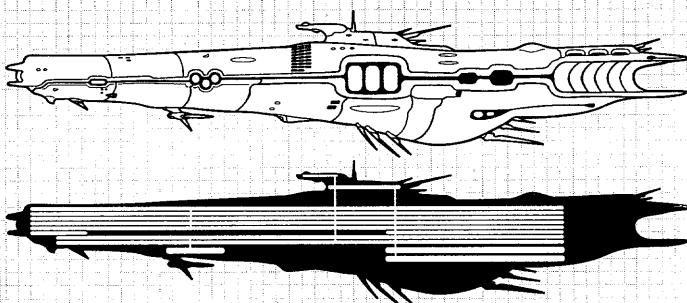
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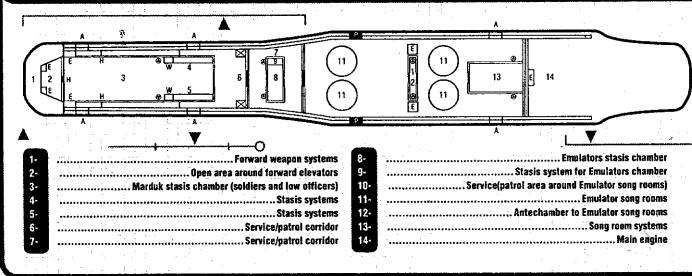
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# Uribram

CREATED BY  
JEFF GRUBB

ART BY B. LESSL

THE LAST  
THING I  
REMEMBER  
I WAS FOL-  
LOWING ACE  
INTO THIS  
PORTAL.

TRAVELING FROM  
ONE DIMENSION INTO  
ANOTHER SEEMS TO BE  
ELEVATING THE  
MEMORY CENTERS  
IN MY MIND.

I REMEMBER  
WHEN TARANT AND  
ACE FIRST FELL  
INTO MY  
HOMeworld.

ACE CALLED IT  
OUR FIRST DATE.

BUT TARANT BECAME  
VERY UNPLEASANT!

DO NOT  
INTERRUPT ME IN  
THE DUE PROCESS  
OF LAW!

URK!

NOOO!

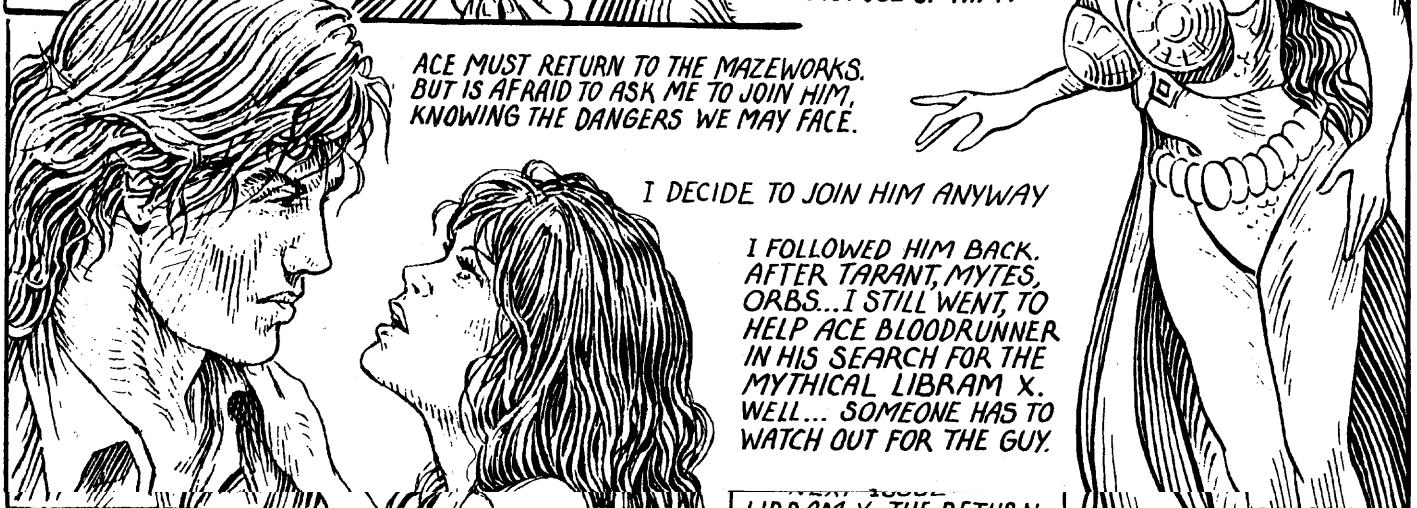
I ENDED UP BEING THROWN INTO THE MAZEWORLD!





AFTER ESCAPING  
FROM THE HELLBANE  
ARTILLERY, WE MET  
CHARLIE, THE CYBER-  
GOUL, WHO SAW TO IT THAT  
I WAS OUTFITTED IN WARRIOR GAAB.

THEN  
MORE  
BATTLES  
TRYING  
TO FIND  
A DOOR  
BACK  
HOME.



# Dragonmooth



By Matthew Guss

RON, YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFUL IN THIS DUNGEON. THE MONSTERS ARE GOING TO TRY AND GET YOU FIRST.



OF COURSE THEY WILL!

I'M THE WIZARD! I'M THEIR DEADLIEST OPPONENT! I'M...



THE BIGGEST TARGET.



AH-HA! THERE YOU TWO WORTHLESS BOYS ARE! BACK FROM ADVENTURING AND HIDING FROM YOUR OWN MOTHER! IN A SHADY TAVERN, YET! I TELL YOU, IF YOUR FATHER WERE ALIVE, HE WOULD HAVE HAD YOU TWO BEING A RICH MAN AND MAKING AN HONEST LIVING IN THE COUNTRY, AND NOT OUT RUNNING AND CAVORTING WITH MONSTERS AND CAVORTING HOME, YOU TWO! I TELL YOU, THAT YOU EVER LET ME SEE YOU TWO THERE,



I SLAVED AWAY OVER A HOT STOVE FOR YOU TWO DURING THE BEST YEARS OF MY LIFE, AND THIS IS THE THANKS I GET FOR RAISING YOU? YOU BE SO LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH LOVING CHILDS! SOME DAY! THAT'LL TEACH YOU! AND TO GO THROUGH DAYS OF FIGHTS! I WORRY EVER COME TO ME! IF YOU BOYS FIND LIFE COLD, QUIT THIS LIFE AND GET A NEW ONE! THESE GIRLS HAVE, TOO!

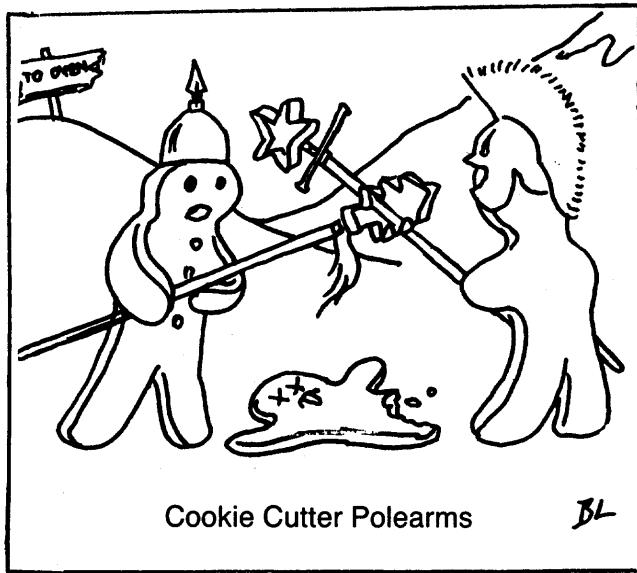


MARK MY WORDS, NO GOOD WILL EVER COME OF THIS LIFE-STYLE! YOU'LL WIND UP IN SOME DEEP, DARK, PIT SOMEWHERE WITH NO LOVING MOTHER TO COME AND BAIL YOU OUT! SO YOU TWO JUST MARCH HOME AND GET STRAIGHT TO YOU!



AHHHH...

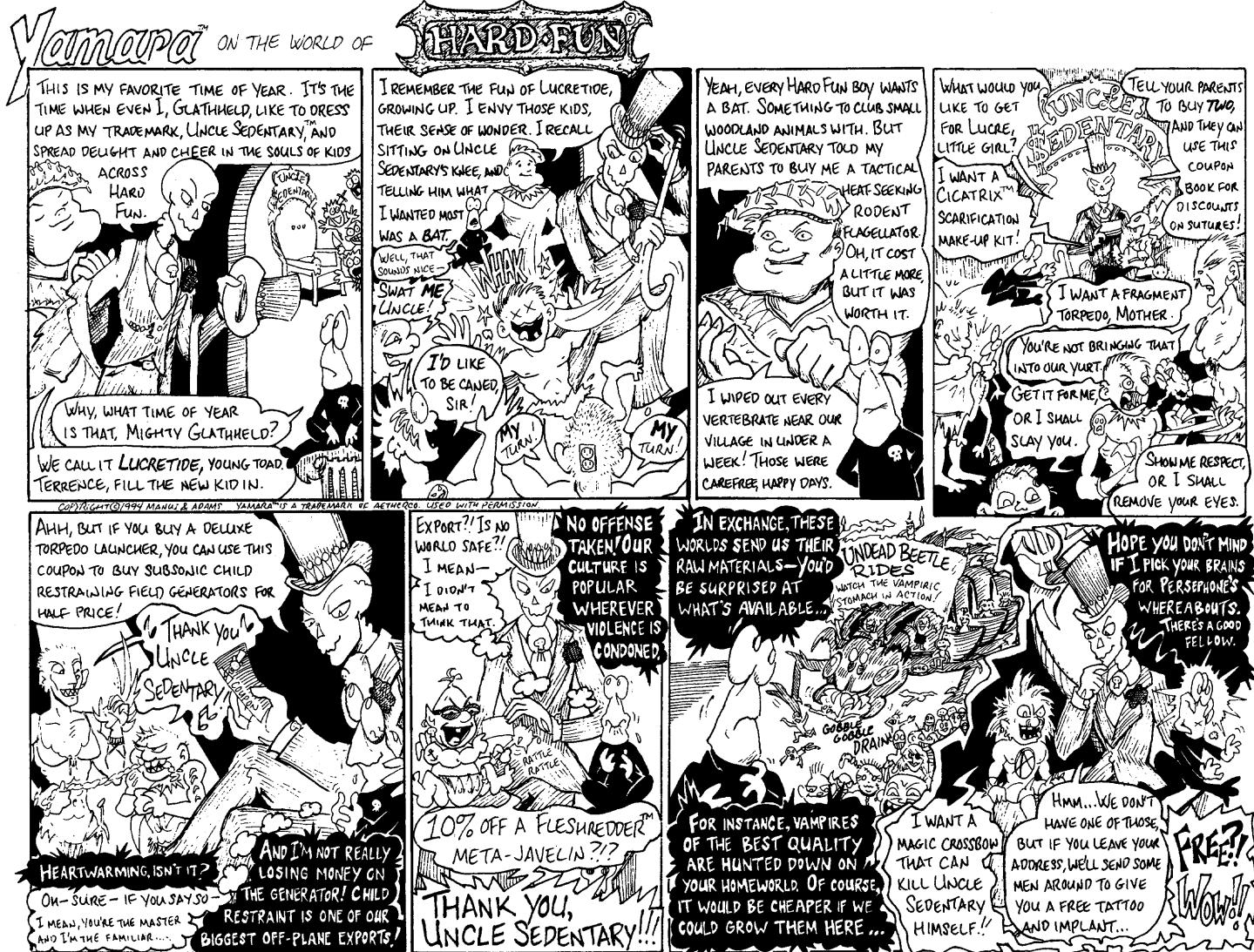




By Brian Lam



By Leonard Wilson



# Gamers Guide

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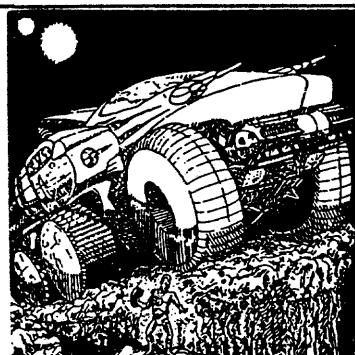
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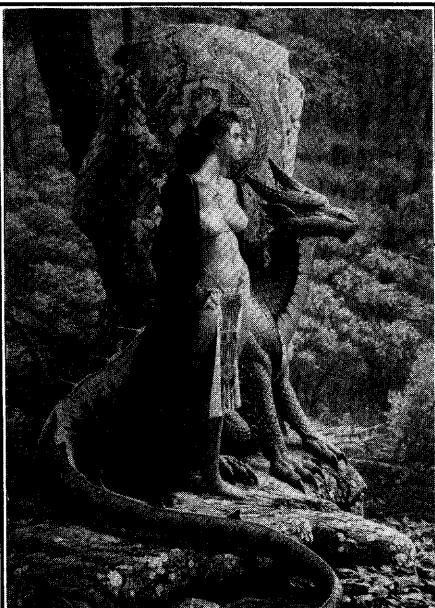
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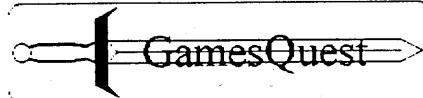
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## Gamers accessorize too!

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Wizard's Chamber (Minifigs)



Once upon a time, games were played with rocks and bones. Then people graduated to dice, cards, and boards with funny shaped pieces. Eventually we became sophisticated enough to create war games in which miniatures were used to represent armies, units, or individual soldiers.

From such origins came role-playing games. At first, these games were played with paper, pencils, and a few oddly shaped dice. It's true! I was there! (Although I did miss out on the bone games.) I suppose that, technically, any miniatures used in role-playing games are accessories, though many players have come to regard them as an integral part of gaming. After all, they represent our characters in a fantastic, imaginary world. Much as the war-gamer's army, they embody our ability to act within the confines of the game's setting. Definitely, however, accessories are those embellishments added to play in order to increase the flavor, detail, or

depth of the gaming experience (a definition that also would include chips and soda).

While not strictly necessary for play, many gamers and GMs prefer the "visually enhanced" mode of gaming. This would, at a minimum, include miniature figures and may very well include floor plans, furniture, and buildings. Each level of detail adds a bit more depth to the player's image of the scene taking place.

Those unyielding individuals who reject such frivolous gaming aids, let's call them "environmentally challenged," may never



know the joy of a well-painted figure, a great floor plan transformed into a colorful playing surface, or a setting brought to life by the use of three dimensions and miniature furnishings. Can you imagine playing today's computer games on an abacus?

Obviously, this column focuses on accessories, though there are a few figure reviews as well. Taking a look at the future, some great things are going to be happening in miniatures. Grenadier is coming out with a line of assemble-your-own figures (the previews look great), Thunderbolt has some Pavilions coming, Leading Edge has some great new stuff, Ral Partha has a new PLANESCAPE™ line out, and Minifigs is remastering almost their entire catalog, making for much improved products. We'll hear more about these in future columns.

By way of public-service announcement: Brian Hitsman of Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures has gone on to form Majestic, a moldmaking and consulting firm. Recognized as one of the most skilled moldsmen in the industry, Brian will be improving the production quality of many manufacturers, so we may soon be enjoying a universal improvement in metal figures.

Also, Grenadier is selling their entire stock of Kryomek products at half price. Now, I haven't seen all the metal products, but the resin stuff is incredible. And at half price . . . I just thought I should tell you before they're cleaned out.

Due to the feedback I've been receiving, both from within the miniatures industry and from readers such as yourselves, it was decided that I should use some sort of rating system in the reviews. (O.K., already! Put the sharp things away!) Because I'm contrary and don't feel that a five-star system gives a large enough range, I will use a scale of 1 to 10.

In addition, because a single rating doesn't always tell the whole story, figures will be rated in three categories: Technical, Artistic, and Value. The Technical category will cover parting lines, flash, mold shift,

### Explanation of Ratings

- 1 Slag, a good doorstop
- 2 Poor, for die-hards only
- 3 Well below average, needs work
- 4 Below average, but salvageable
- 5 Standard, average quality

- 6 Good, definitely worth your perusal
- 7 Great, have you seen this yet?
- 8 Excellent, you have to see this!
- 9 Incredible, where can I get one?
- 10 No mortal hands produced this!

and other casting flaws. Artistic will cover detail, creativity, appeal, position, and related qualities. Value will tell you how good a deal the figure is, based on the overall quality and cost. Value is the category I most fear. While the other categories are mostly qualitative, this one is subjective. Everyone has different views on figures and what they're willing to pay. Consequently, you will have to remember that this is only my opinion, hopefully a well-informed and experienced opinion, but only my opinion nonetheless.

For an expanded explanation of the categories, read on:

**Technical:** An average figure will have a few parting lines and even can have some thin sheeting between the legs or between arm and body. It also requires 2-4 minutes per piece to prep, not including assembly. A technically excellent figure has virtually no parting lines, flash, or pits, and multiple pieces fit snugly together. Threads on a figure indicate conscientious moldmaking, so I don't grade down for threads unless they are heavy or in dumb places (such as the face).

**Artistic:** Good proportions and decent features are the norm in current miniatures, so it will be the crisp features and attention to detail that get the high marks. Good movement, realistic poses, and creativity are big pluses here, as are good facial expressions. Consideration will be made for the effect the figure is intended to generate, and whether or not it succeeds in that effect.

**Value:** The average price for a 25-mm figure is about \$2 to \$2.50. The value of a figure is a function of the quality (technical and artistic) and price. High quality + high price = average value, average quality + high price = poor value, and high quality + low price = great value. There will be times that a figure gets a high value rating regardless of price, because it's such an incredible figure that you should see it regardless of cost.

Miniatures games and related printed materials will be rated on Presentation, Playability, and Value. Presentation will include illustration, layout, physical quality, and appearance. Playability tells how well the rules play or integrate with a parent rules set, and whether they are clear and free of contradictions. Fun is the main ingredient—so what if the rules are good if the game is boring?

For the next *From the Forge* column, we'll have a huge cast of gaming terrain, from bridges to rivers to walls. You can write with your comments and suggestions to *From the Forge*, P.O. Box 9, Murrieta CA 92564.

## Reviews

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### #1-10 The Wizard's Chamber

FANTASCENES\* line  
Sculptor: Renee Perez  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$5.98  
Technical: 6 Artistic: 7  
Value: 6

The Wizards Chamber is a great set of furnishings for a spell-caster's room. The casting is pretty good, though some filing is required in out-of-the-way places. Mold lines are minor, except on the table base.

The set includes an ornate mirror, a table littered with books, a clawed book stand, a small table with a crystal ball, and a chair. The tables and book stand require minimal assembly.

Finer points include a pentagram etched into the crystal ball stand and curved snakes forming the table and book stands. The detail is very good and these props will prove extremely useful as role-playing aids or in dioramas.

### #0003 Enchanted Cottage and

### #0004 Apothecary

FANTASCENES line  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$29.95 each  
Technical: 7 Artistic: 7  
Value: 5

Perfect for role-playing or miniatures gaming, the three-piece Enchanted Cottage comes with the interior furnishings of a cot, table, stools, and lantern. The Apothecary is a three-piece daub & wattle building that also includes a work table, candelabra, credenza, and chair.

Both are made from heavy, expanded foam, but are very clean. A little clean-up is required about the edges, but the material is exceptionally easy to work with. The furnishings are metal and pretty cleanly cast, though there are lines along the tops of the benches.

The cottage is thatch roofed and detailed inside and out, with rock walls, cobblestone floor, and stone fireplace. The walls can be attached to the base with white glue or epoxy, but I would paint the pieces first, then touch up over the joints. The Apothecary has plank flooring, a brick hearth, and framed walls. The thatched roof is well done, including the attic window.

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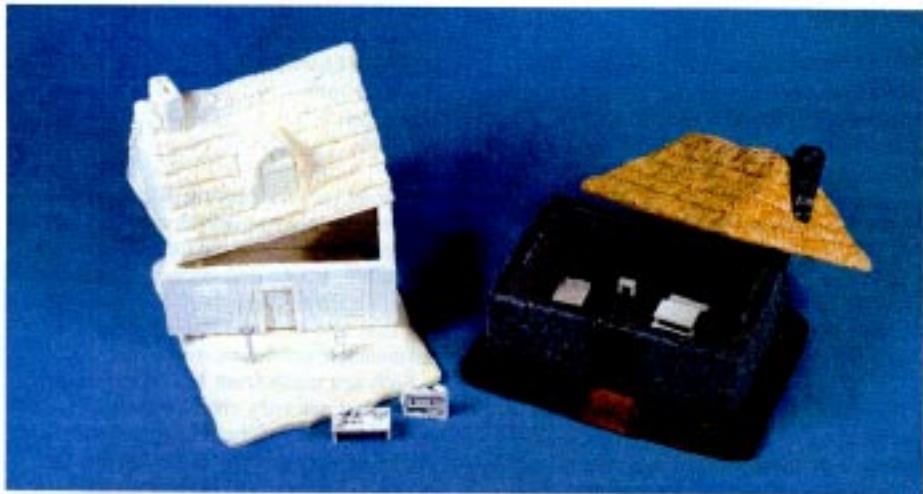
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Telephone: (01902) 661818

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Enchanted Cottage & Apothecary (Minifigs)

These are excellent pieces of work, and are great ideas! I was surprised at the strength of the material, but you still won't want to be too rough with it. Those who live in foam houses . . .

#### Dungeonworks

P.O. Box 1130  
Ames IA 50014  
Voice: (515) 292-6760 Fax: (515) 292-6704  
Mail Order: Yes Catalog: Free

#### #0001 Dungeonworks boxed set

Sculptor: Chris Atkins  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$21.95  
Technical: 9 Artistic: 8  
Value: 7

Dungeonworks is an accessory for role-players. It's designed to allow GMs and players create temporary, 3-D floor plans by placing magnetic based, plastic walls or a painted metal base.

The detail is excellent and the walls paint very well. There are a few minor

parting lines along the edges, but they clean away easily with a hobby knife.

The set includes a painted, 10" x 10" base, 25 walls, and five archways. The archways serve as openings or doors. Because the wall bases are magnetized, they stay in place very well despite a shaking table, and they can be easily moved when altering floorplans on the playing surface.

New and upcoming Dungeonworks products provide doors and lintels, furnishings, torches (which fit into holes in the walls), short wall sections, narrow wall sections, and even a torture room (for you happy-go-lucky types). This is the perfect gift for that special someone who's wiped up his last grease pencil or permanently marked her vinyl mat!

#### Grendel Productions Ltd.

80 Jane Street  
Edinburgh EH6 5HG  
United Kingdom

Distributed in the U.S. by

#### Heartbreaker Hobbies & Games

19 E. Central Ave  
Paoli PA 19301  
Voice: (215) 544-9052 Fax: (215) 544-9052  
Mail Order: Yes Catalog: Free

#### #F0018 Dungeon Doors

GRENDEL\* Imported  
Sculptor: P. Flannery  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$19.95  
Technical: 9 Artistic: 9  
Value: 6

These eight reversible doors give you 16 choices for use as a role-playing aid or in diorama construction. The designs present a great variety and a few doors have a similar design, in case you want some continuity in your diorama or game.

I don't know how these are cast, but they are definitely not cast in two dimensions. The detail is too crisp on all sides to be done using conventional methods. The medium also is completely free of bubbles and pits, which are common occurrences in most resins. There are a few areas of light flash, but they clean away easily with a hobby knife or file.

These doors are well conceived and sculpted. Some are the typical, reinforced wooden doors while others are framed with pillars and lined with metal. Most are original designs set in well sculpted stonework. These are gorgeous doors that can be used for both game play and in diorama construction.

#### #F0020 Pharaoh's Crypt

GRENDEL imported  
Sculptor: Alan Simpson  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$19.95  
Technical: 8 Artistic: 8  
Value: 6

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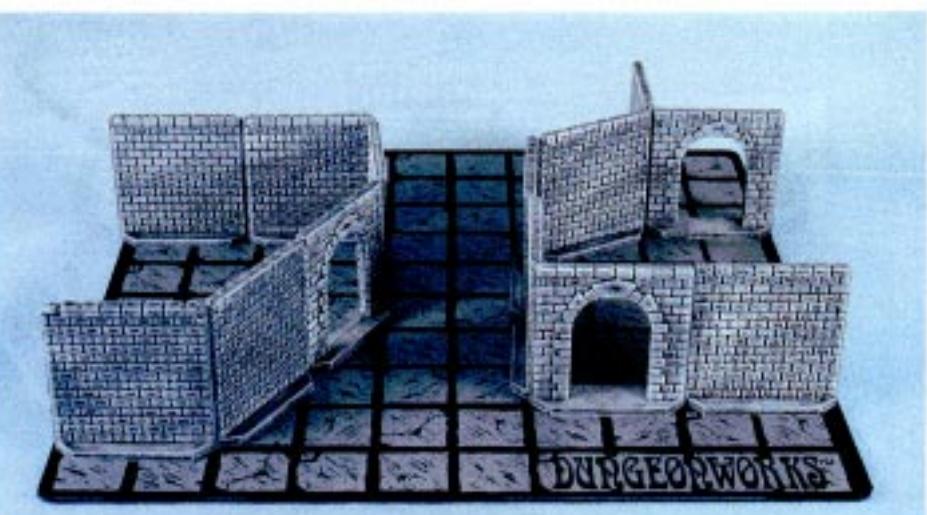
**PLUS FIGURES BY:**  
CITADEL, GRENADIER, MITHRIL, MINIFIGS, RAL PATHA, RAFM.

Containing a crypt door/wall, a jackal topped crypt, two urns, and a sarcophagus, this set will prove an excellent aid for either role-playing or diorama building.

Detailed on all sides, Grendel is using some incredible production methods to produce such pieces. The only noticeable parting lines are on the urns, the other pieces are very clean. There is excess material along the base of each model, so you'll want to use some fine sandpaper to file them down.

The time and effort that went into detailing the crypt wall and doorway, and the jackal topped crypt, is staggering. The style is very reminiscent of the hieroglyphics I saw in my Western Civilization class, so the appearance is somewhat authentic.

The urns and sarcophagus pale by comparison. There is little detail on them, but what do you expect from urns? You may want to paint them with Egyptian designs.



Dungeonworks boxed set (Dungeonworks)

### Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

656 E. McMillan  
Cincinnati OH 45206-1991  
Voice: (800) 235-3908 Fax: (800) 235-3908  
Mail Order: Yes Catalog: Yes  
(enclose 2 stamps)

#### #1035 Dueling Wizards

Vignette series

Sculptor: Tom Meier

Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$13.95

Technical: 7 Artistic: 9

Value: 8

Dueling Wizards is a vignette depicting two spell-casters locked in an arcane duel. The wizard's powers take the forms of the elemental forces—water and fire.

The vignette is made up of eight pieces without any complex joints. Each piece mounts on one of three bases, requiring little or no epoxy. Mold lines are nearly indistinguishable, except on the base pieces that have some heavy lines and vent threads along the bare edges. The bases are easily taken care of, though a little time is required.

The wizards both appear middle-aged and wear highly stylized, detailed clothing.

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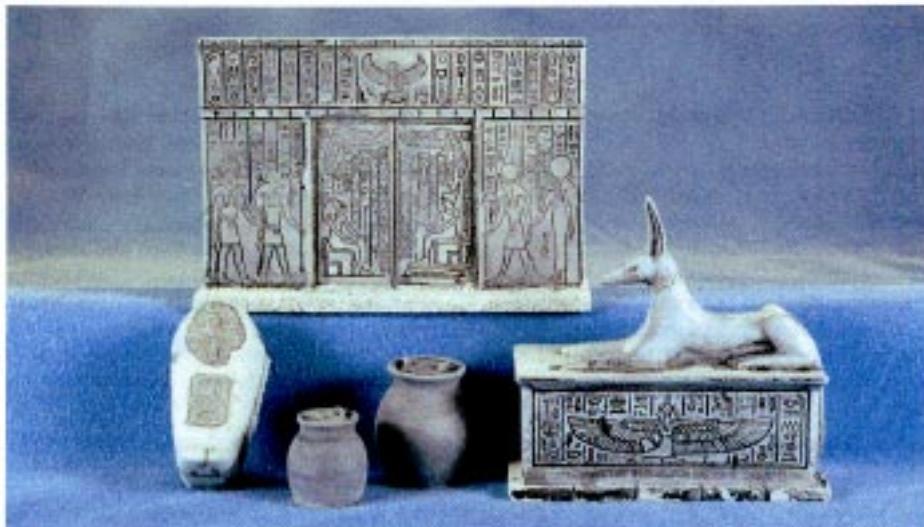
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MEKTON



Dungeon Doors (Heartbreaker)



Pharaoh's Crypt (Heartbreaker)



Dueling Wizards (Thunderbolt)

They also wear skull-caps, plus all manner of embellishments and jewelry. The dais that they stand upon are inscribed with powerful, geometric sigils. Behind each wizard is a huge symbol, one of which is undescribably detailed.

The elemental forces representing the arcanists' wills are struggling to destroy each other—pushing, working for an advantage, while the wizards throw more and more power into the battle.

An incredible figure from an incredible

line, this scene appears as a moment frozen in time. The creativity, detail, and impression of the vignette is incredible. Not a terribly difficult piece to assemble, painting it will require a great deal of time and talent in order to do the piece justice.

#### Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.

5938 Carthage Ct.  
Cincinnati OH 45212  
Voice: (800) 543-0272 Fax: (513) 631-0028  
Mail Order: Yes Catalog: \$4.00

#### #11-120 Lab Work Tables (2) & Labware

RAVENLOFT® line  
Sculptor: Jeff Wilhelm  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$5.50  
Technical: 9 Artistic: 7  
Value: 7

With two tables and an assortment of beakers, bottles, jars, and test tubes, this RAVENLOFT set is very versatile. It would serve in any gothic horror or laboratory setting.

There is very little in the way of parting lines. Assembly is easy and requires little additional effort to fit the pieces.

The table has three books held up by a human skull. With the myriad of accessories, each table can be customized to your heart's content. The accessories include beakers, bottles, and jars, which are very well shaped. These are a must for any laboratory or workshop setting. Perfect for diorama and vignette uses, this set is destined to become a staple for role-players, as well.

#### #01-504 Takhisis, Queen of Darkness

DRAGONLANCE® line  
Sculptor: Tom Meier  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$69.95  
Technical: 8 Artistic: 9  
Value: 10

Once in a while, someone produces a figure that you must have—Takhisis is one of those. A limited edition piece, only 5,000 were made, you won't have long to get one for yourself. Each figure comes with a numbered certificate, documenting which number it is in the series, and also has a numbered plaque on the base.

The casting of all 17 pieces that make up this model is excellent. Only a few threads show that it isn't the original sculpture. The base has a slight gouge where the main flow of metal was, but a little epoxy will take care of that.

This piece is definitely for modelers, since there is so much to assemble. You will need some epoxy for the assembly, as usual, but there are some areas that will need extra care because the pieces don't match exactly, like where the necks meet the body.

The detail and proportions are excellent, and the impression is very close to the original artwork by Clyde Caldwell. You can see the photograph, what else needs to be said?

At the 1992 GEN CON® Game Fair, Ral Partha released The Great Red Dragon, their previous limited edition, for \$50. They sold out in record time and within a few weeks the Great Red was selling for as much as \$200 in those few shops that still had stock. So what I'm saying is, if you don't get it now you may not get another chance.

## Ral Partha Invades Canada!

The people of Canada rejoice...

By Ral

The Partha Chronicle

The people of Canada rejoice, for Ral Partha now distributes directly into the great nation of Canada. For years, Canadian fans of Ral Partha miniatures have complained about lack of product selection, lack of inventory, and even poor quality in Canada. Many Canadian customers crossed the border to do their miniature shopping.

Good news! Now Canadians can find Ral Partha product in their own country. Ral Partha is shipping to Canadian Retail Stores via Canadian Distributors. This means the whole of Partha's line is available and the quality United States

customers have received shall now be Canada's.

If this is not so. If there is a problem with the new plan. Ral Partha wants to hear about it. Call the toll-free number now made available to customers in the USA and Canada, 1-800-543-0272. Call this number, Monday thru Friday, 8:30 to 5:00 EST. Someone will surely help you, whether its helping you locate a hobby store near you or searching out a particular miniature or paint color you or your game store can not find.

The best news of all, the prices will remain competitive with past pricing of Ral Partha product. Ral Partha thanks you for your continued support.

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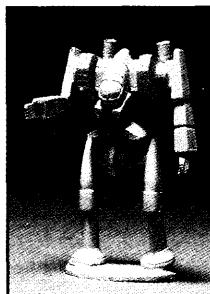
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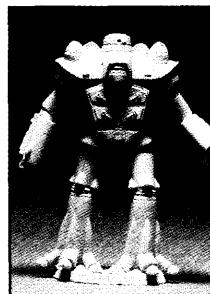
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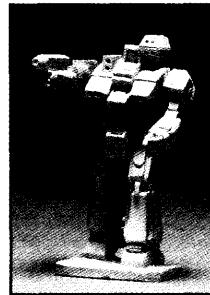
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By The Great Partha the Seer  
Editor of The Partha Chronicle

The Great Partha has seen the future once again. 1067 years from now, there will be a great war on the astral plane. Brave warriors in giant mechanical war machines will fight for domination over vast regions of space. The power I have seen would make the mightiest Dragon tremble in fear.

So that all may see and know that I speak the truth, I have included these renderings to show what lies in our future. May the stars protect and guide us. Till next time, be well.

*Partha*  
The Great Seer

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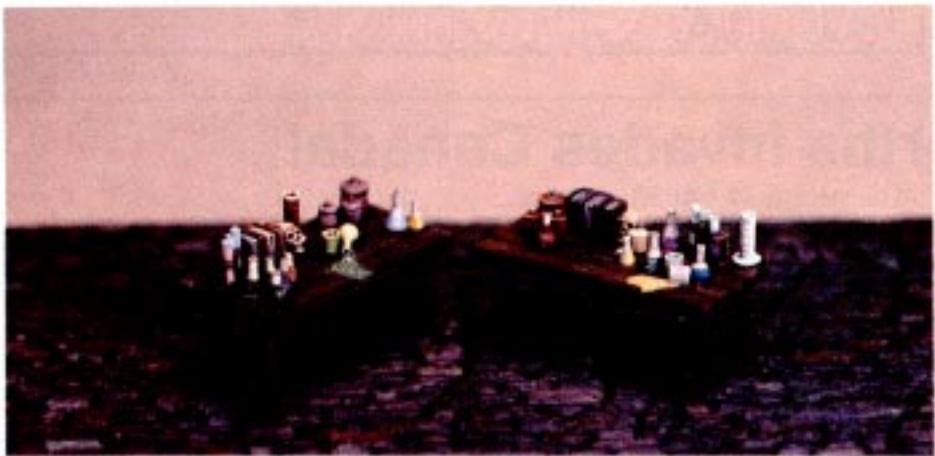
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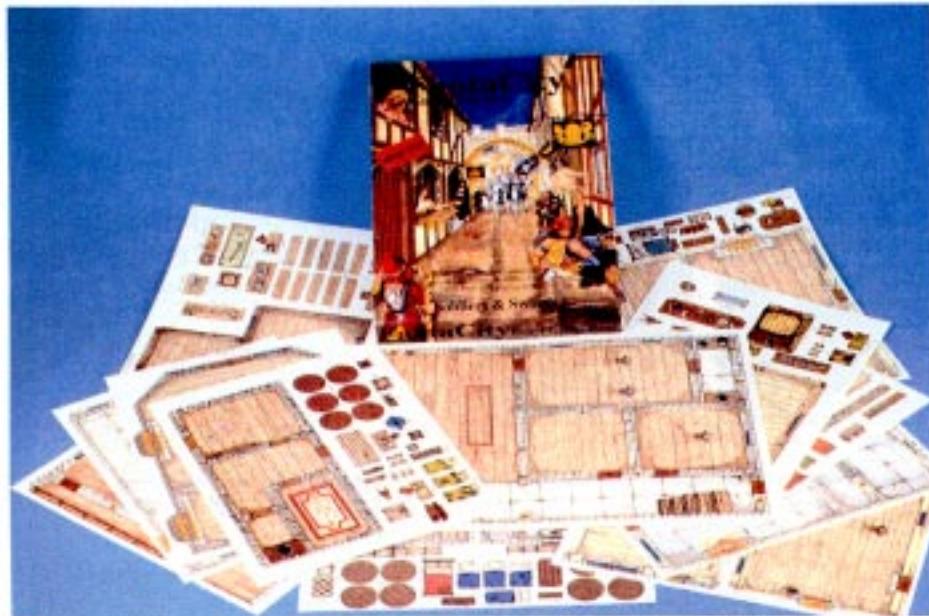
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Takhisis (Ral Partha)



MegaCity Pak (Soldiers & Swords)

## Soldiers & Swords Games

40 Jarvis Street  
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Mail Order: Yes Catalog: \$3.00

### #311100 MegaCity Pak

FANTACITY\* series  
Artist: Howard Bullard  
Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$24.95  
Technical: 7 Artistic: 7  
Value: 5

The MegaCity Pak is a collection of floor plans from all previous FANTACITY sets. Though none of the figures from those packs are included, the set contains 12 standard sized sheets of full-color floor plans and accessories, as well as two 11" x 17" sheets with the first floors of the inn and mansion.

Included are: a cottage, alchemist's shop, jail, mansion, town hall, inn/tavern, an armorer's shop, and a number of others. Everything you need to give the impression of a good sized town. Each floor section carries a 1" hex grid for easy measurement, and they are scaled for 25-mm figures.

The artwork is very good and includes such details as support beams, water-closets (bathrooms, for you contemporary types), fireplaces, doors, and windows. Among the myriad accessories you'll find beds, rugs, bookcases, tables, wells, and many other niceties of civilization. These are great gaming aids, and all you have to do is cut them out.

### Best of show

Oddly enough, even though this column focused on accessories, most of the awards were captured by models. Ral Partha's Takhisis and T-Bolt's Dueling Wizards are both incredible pieces, both sculpted by Tom Meier, and both awarded Modeler's award for this column. While Takhisis is a huge, ominous figure giving the impression of inherent strength, the Duel is a delicate, finesse piece with a great deal of intricate detail.

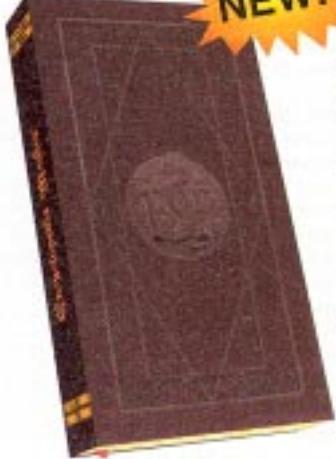
The gamer's award had a few contenders, but a tie goes to the Storm Angel from Global, and Grendel's Dungeon Doors. The Storm Angel is such an impressive piece of detail work and imagination! She just makes you want to pick up your brush. The Dungeon Doors are excellently detailed and finely crafted accessories that will enrich the playing area or diorama of any gamer or modeler.

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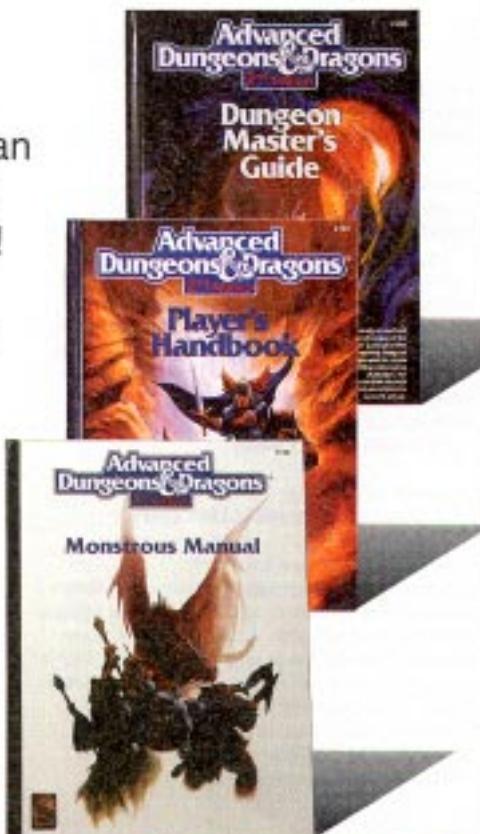
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*Marco Volo: Arrival*  
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In this thrilling finale to the "Marco Volo" trilogy, the imposter pretending to be Volo is on the run—but from whom? That is up to the PCs to solve in this 32-page adventure.

**\$6.95 U.S./\$8.95 CAN./£4.50 U.K.**  
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## NEW PRODUCTS FOR JANUARY, 1995

*1994 MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual*

An AD&D® game accessory  
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Cover art by Robh Ruppel  
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Cover art by Dana Knutson  
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\* "Nbod's Room" (AD&D® game; solo PC level 4-5) by Jeff Crook.

\* "Ailamere's Lair" (AD&D game; 6-9) by Steve Fetsch.

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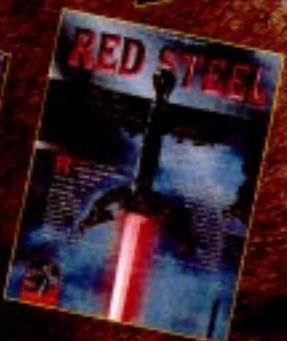
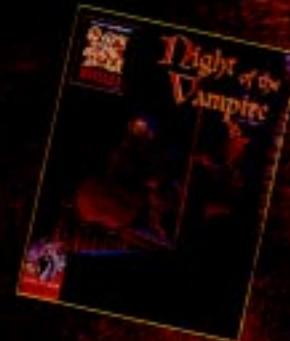
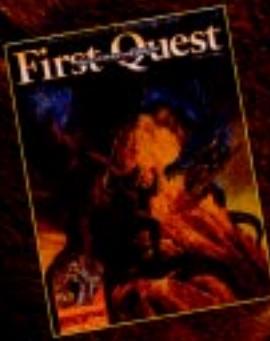
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